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BOOK I.

ASH WEDNESDAY MORNING.

A SIREN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST NIGHT OF CARNIVAL.

IT was Carnival time in the ancient and once imperial, but now provincial and remote, city of Ravenna. It was Carnival time, and the very acme and high-tide of that season of mirth and revel. For the theory of Carnival observance is, that the life of it, unlike that of most other things and beings, is intensified with a constantly crescendo movement up to the last minutes of its existence. And there now remained but an hour before midnight on the Tuesday preceding the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday—*Dies Cinerum!*—that sad and sober morrow which has brought with it "sermons and soda-water" to so many generations of revellers.

Of course Carnival, according to the Calendar and

Time's hour-glass, is over at twelve o'clock on the night of Shrove Tuesday. Generally, however, in the pleasure-loving cities of Italy, a few hours' law are allowed or winked at. The revellers are not supposed to become aware that it is past midnight till about three or four in the morning.

Very generally the wind-up of the season of fun and frolic consists of what is called a "Veglione," or "great making a night of it," which means a masked ball at the theatre. And the great central chandelier does not begin to descend into the body of the house, to have its lights flapped out by the handkerchiefs of the revellers amid a last frantic rondo, till some four hours after midnight. But in provincial Ravenna, a Pope's city under the rule of a Cardinal Legate, there is—or was in the days when the Pope held sway there—no Veglione. Its place was supplied, as far as "the society" of the city was concerned, by a ball at the "Circolo dei Nobili."

It was not, therefore, till four o'clock in the morning, or perhaps even a little later, that the lights would be extinguished on the night in question at the "Circolo dei Nobili," and Carnival would, in truth, be over, and the tired holiday-makers would go home to their beds.

A few hours more remained, and the revelry was at its height, and the dancers danced as knowing that their minutes were numbered.

There had been a ball on the previous night at the Palazzo of the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare. But the scene at the Circolo was a much more brilliant, animated, and varied one than that of the night before at the Castelmare palace. The Marchese Lamberto was the wealthiest noble in Ravenna, and —putting aside his friend the Cardinal Legate—was, in many other respects, the first and foremost man of the city. He was a bachelor of some fifty years old. And bachelors' houses and bachelors' balls have the reputation of enjoying the privilege of a somewhat freer and more unreserved gaiety and jollity than those of their neighbours more heavily weighted with the cares and responsibilities of life. But such was not the case at the Palazzo Castelmare. Presided over on such occasions as that of the great annual Carnival ball by a widowed sister-in-law of the Marchese, the Castelmare palace was the most decorous and respectable house, as its master was the most decorous and respectable man, in Ravenna.

Not that it was a dull house. The Marchese Lamberto, though a grave and dignified personage in

the eyes of the "jeunesse dorée" of Ravenna, was looked up to as one of the best loved, as well as most respected, men in the city. And there was not a member of the "society" who would not have been sadly hurt at not being invited to the great annual Carnival ball at the Castelmare palace. But the same degree of *laissez aller* jollity would not have been "de mise" there as was permissible at the Circolo. The fun was not so fast and furious as it was wont to be at the club of the nobles on the last night of the Carnival.

The whole society were at the latter gathering. All the nobles of Ravenna were the hosts; and everybody was there solely and entirely to amuse and enjoy themselves. Host and guests, indeed, were almost identical. There were but few persons present, and those strangers to the town, who did not belong to their own class.

To the Marchese, on the previous night, most of the company had contented themselves with going in "domino." At the Circolo ball a very large proportion of the dancers were in costume. The Conte Leandro Lombardoni,—lady-killer, Don Juan, and poet, whose fortunes and misfortunes in these characters had made him the butt of the entire

society, and had perhaps contributed, together with his well-known extraordinarily pronounced propensity for cramming himself with pastry, to give him the pale, puffed, pasty face, swelling around a pair of pale fish-like eyes, that distinguished him,—the Conte Leandro Lombardoni, indeed, had gone to the Castelmare palace as "Apollo," in a costume which young Ludovico Castelmare, the Marchese Lamberto's nephew, would insist on mistaking for that of Æsop; and had now, according to a programme perfectly well known previously throughout the city, come to the Circolo as "Dante." The Tuscan "lucco," or long flowing gown, had at least the advantage of concealing from the public eye much that the Apollo costume had injudiciously exhibited.

Ludovico Castelmare had adopted the costume of a Venetian noble of the sixteenth century; and very strikingly handsome he looked in that most picturesque of all dresses. The Marchese Lamberto was at the ball, of course, but not in costume. Perhaps the most striking figure in the rooms, however, was one of those few persons who have been mentioned as present, but not belonging to Ravenna, or to the class of its nobles. This was a lady, well known at that day throughout Italy as Bianca Lalli—"La

Lalli," or "La Bianca," in theatrical parlance—for she was one of the first singers of the day. Special circumstances—to be explained at a future page—had rendered it possible for remote little Ravenna to secure the celebrated artist for the Carnival, which was now expiring. The Marchese Lamberto, who, among many other avocations and occupations, all of them contributing in some way or other to the welfare and advantage of his native city, was a great lover and connoisseur of music, and patron of the theatre, had been mainly instrumental in bringing *La Lalli* to Ravenna. The engagement had been a most successful one. The "Diva Bianca" had sung through the Carnival, charming all ears and hearts in Ravenna with her voice, and all eyes with her very remarkable and fascinating beauty. And now, on this last night of the festive season, she was the cynosure of all eyes at the ball.

Bianca had, as it so happened, also chosen a Venetian costume of the same period as that of Ludovico—about the middle of the sixteenth century. In truth, it was mere chance that had led to this similarity. And neither of them, as it happened, had mentioned to the other the dress they intended to wear. Bianca, in fact, used as she was to wear

costumes of all sorts, and to outshine all beauties neat her in all or any of them, had thought nothing about her dress, till the evening before; and then had consulted the Marchese Lamberto on the subject: but had been so much occupied with him during nearly the whole of that evening at his ball, that she had not said a word about it to any one else.

It could not but seem, however, to everybody that the Marchese Ludovico and La Lalli had agreed together to represent a pair belonging to the most gorgeous and picturesque days of Venetian history. And a most magnificently handsome pair they made. Bianca's dress, or at least the general appearance and effect of it, will readily be imagined by those acquainted with the full-length portraits of Titian or Tintoretto. A more strictly "proper" costume no lady could wish to wear. And the *jeunesse dorée* of Ravenna, who had thought it likely that the Diva would appear as some light-skirted Flora, or high-kirtled Diana, were altogether disappointed.

But there was much joking and raillery about the evident and notable *pair*-ship of Ludovico and Bianca; and it came to pass that, almost without any special intention on their own part, they were thrown much together, and danced together frequently. And this,

under the circumstances, was still more the case than it would have otherwise been, in consequence of the Marchese Lamberto not dancing. It was a long time since he had done so. There were many men dancing less fitted than he, as far as appearance and capability, and even as far as years went, to join in such amusements. Nevertheless, all Ravenna would have been almost as much surprised to see the Marchese Lamberto dressed in mumming costume, and making one among Carnival revellers, as to see the Cardinal himself doing the same things. He had made for himself a social position, and a life so much apart from any such levities, that his participation in them would have seemed a monstrosity.

It may be doubted, however, whether on this occasion, at least, the dignified Marchese was satisfied with the position he had thus made for himself. It would have been too absurd and remarkable for La Bianca to have abstained from dancing and attached herself to him in the ball-room, instead of consorting with the younger folks. Of course that was entirely out of the question. But none the less for that was the evening a time of cruel suffering and martyrdom to the Marchese. Of course he believed that the adoption of so singularly similar a costume

by Bianca and his nephew was the result of pre-arranged agreement. And the thought, and all that his embittered fancy built upon the thought, were making everything around him, and all the prospect of his life before him, utterly intolerable to him.

Ludovico and Bianca had been dancing together for the third time—a waltz fast and furious, which they had kept up almost incessantly till the music had ceased. Heated and breathless, he led her out of the ball-room to get some refreshment. There was a large supper-room which, on the cessation of the waltz, immediately became crowded by other couples bent on a similar errand. But there had also been established a little subsidiary buffet in a small cabinet at the furthest end of the suite of rooms, for the purpose of drawing off some of the crowd from the main supper-room. And thither Ludovico led Bianca, thinking to avoid the crush of people rushing in to the larger room.

The young Marchese—the "Marchesino," as he was often called, to distinguish him from his uncle, the Marchese Lamberto—was one of the small committee of the Circolo, who had had the management of all the arrangements for the ball; and was, accordingly, well aware of the whereabouts of this little

"succursale" to the supper-room. But it is probable that the existence of it was unknown to the great majority of the company. At all events, so it happened, that when Ludovico and Bianca reached it, it was wholly untenanted, save by Dante, in his long red gown, solitarily occupied in cramming himself with pastry.

"What, Dante in exile!" cried Ludovico. "Pray, Sir Poet, which *bolgia* was set apart for those who are lost by the 'peccato della gola?' or is a bilious fit in the more immediate future *bolgia* fearful enough?"

"It is not so bad a *bolgia* as that appointed for some other sins," said the Conte Leandro, with his mouth stuffed with cake, as he moved out of the room.

"What an animal it is!" said Ludovico, laughing, as he gave Bianca a glass of champagne, and filled another for himself.

"Take some of this woodcock pie, Signora Bianca? You must be starved by this time; and I can recommend it."

"How so? You have not tasted it yourself yet."

"No; but I am going to do so. And my recommendation is based on my knowledge of the qualities of our woodcocks. They are the finest in the world.

The marshes in the neighbourhood of the Pineta breed them in immense quantities."

"Oh, I have heard so much of the Pineta. They say it is so lovely."

"The most beautiful forest in the world. And this is just the time when it is in its greatest beauty, —the early spring, when the wild flowers are all beginning to blossom, and the birds are all singing. There is nothing like our Pineta!"

"I should so like to see it. It does seem really a shame to leave Ravenna without ever having seen the Pineta."

"Oh, you must not dream of doing so. You must make a little excursion one of these fine spring days. It is just the time for it. Some morning, the earlier the better. But I dare say your habits are not very matutinal, Signora?"

"Well, not very, for the most part. But I would willingly make them matutinal for such a purpose at any time. How far is it?"

"Oh, a mere nothing—at the city gates almost—a couple of miles, perhaps. You may go out by the *Porta Nuova*, at the end of the Corso, and so to that part of the forest which lies to the southward of the city; or by the northern road, which very soon

enters the wood on that side. Perhaps the finest part of the Pineta is that to the southwards. Of all places in the world it is the spot for a *colazione al fresco*."

"I should so like it. I have heard of the Pineta di Ravenna all my life."

"What do you say to going this very morning?" said Ludovico, after thinking for a minute. "There is no time like the present. It will be a charming finish to our Carnival—new and original, too! Do you feel as if you had go enough left for it?"

"Oh, as for that," said Bianca, laughing with lips and eyes, "I am up to anything. I should like it of all things. But——"

"Ah! what a terrible word that 'but' is. But what?" said Ludovico, who had no sooner conceived the idea than he became eager to put it into execution. "But what?"

"But—a great many things. Unhappily, there is no word comes oftener into one's life than that odious 'but.' *But* who is to go with me? I cannot go all alone by myself?"

"Oh, that's no *but* at all. Of course, Signora, I did not propose such an expedition to you without

proposing to myself the honour of accompanying you," said Ludovico with a profound bow.

"What a *scappata!* I should like it of all things. But—there it comes again! 'But' the second; will not the good people say all sorts of ill-natured and absurd things?"

"Not a bit of it—in my case, Signora. Everybody knows that we have been very good friends; and that I have not been coxcomb enough to have ever hoped to be aught more to you, having been protected, as they all know, from such danger in the only way in which a man could possibly be protected from it," said Ludovico, bowing again.

"Dear me! What way is that? It might be so useful to know. Would it be equally applicable to a lady, I wonder?" said Bianca, looking at him half-laughingly, half-poutingly, with her head on one side.

"Oh yes! perfectly applicable in all cases, Signora. It is only to have no heart to lose, having lost it already," returned he.

"Oh, come! This is a confidence *dans les régles!* And in return for it, Signor Ludovico, do you know—speaking in all seriousness—that—if we really do put this wild scheme into execution—I have

a confidence to give you, and may take that opportunity of making it—a confidence, not which may or may not be made, like yours, but which I ought to make to you, the necessity of making which furnishes, to say the truth, a very plausible reason for our projected *tête-à-tête*."

"*Davvero*, Signora! Better and better; I shall be charmed to receive such a mark of your friendship," said Ludovico, thinking and caring little on what subject it might be that the Diva purposed speaking to him: "and then, the fact is," he continued, "that to-morrow morning will be the best morning for the purpose of all the days of the year. For we shall be quite sure that every soul here will be in bed and asleep. On the first morning in Lent one is tolerably safe not to fall in with early risers. Our little trip, you may be very sure, will never be heard of by anybody, unless we choose to tell of it ourselves."

"And I am sure that I do not see why we should not," said Bianca.

"I see no reason against telling all the town, for my part," rejoined Ludovico; "afterwards though —you understand; and not beforehand, or our little escapade would be spoilt by some blockhead or other

insisting on joining us. Our friend Leandro there, for instance; think of it!"

"The idea is a nightmare! No; we will not say a word till afterwards. 'Tis the most charming notion for a finale to a Carnival that ever was conceived. I make you my compliments on it, Signor Ludovico."

"So, then, all the 'buts' have been butted and rebutted?" said he.

"Well, I suppose so,—by the help of a strong desire to yield to the temptation of so pleasant a scheme,—the way 'buts' generally are answered. But we cannot go on the expedition as we are, I suppose?" said she.

"I don't see why not. I dare say the old pines have seen similar figures beneath them before now. But you would not be comfortable without changing your dress, and the mornings are still sharp. This is how it must be. I will slip away before long, and make all preparation necessary. I will get a *bagarino* and a pony—not from the Castelmare stables, you understand, but from a man I know and can trust—and I will come with it to the door of your lodging at six o'clock. You will stay at the ball till the end. Everybody will go by four o'clock, or soon after.

That will give you plenty of time to change your dress. By six o'clock every soul in Ravenna will be fast asleep. We shall drive to a little farm-house I know on the border of the forest, leave our *bagarino* there, and have our stroll under the trees just as long and as far as is agreeable to you. Won't that do?"

"Perfect! I shall enjoy it amazingly. I will be sure to be ready when you come at six o'clock."

"I will be there at six or thereabouts. Now we will go back to the ball-room; but don't dance till you have not a leg left to stand on. We must have a good long stroll in the Pineta."

"*Lascia fare a me!* I dare say I shan't dance another dance—unless, indeed, we have one more turn together before you go. Is there time?"

"Oh yes, for that plenty of time. If you are not afraid of tiring yourself, one more last dance by all means."

So giving her his arm, the Marchesino led his beautiful and fascinating companion back to the ball-room, where the music was again making the most of the time with another waltz.

CHAPTER II.

APOLLO VINDEX.

The Conte Leandro Lombardoni had not passed a pleasant Carnival. Reconciled, as he had recently professed himself to be—after some one of the frequent misfortunes that happened to his intercourse with them—with the fair sex, he had begun his Carnival by attempting to make his merit acceptable in the eyes of La Lalli; and had failed to obtain any recognition from her, even as a poet, to say nothing of his pretensions as a Don Juan. To a certain limited degree, it had been forced upon his perception, that he had been making an ass of himself; and the appreciation of that fact by the other young men among whom he lived had been indicated with that coarse brutality, as the poet said to himself, which was the outcome of minds not "softened by the study of the ingenuous arts," as his own was. He had been consistently snubbed and flouted, he and his poetry, and his love-making, and his carefully prepared Carnival costumes.

The result was, that at the ball on that last night of the Carnival, the Conte Leandro was not in charity with all men, and, indeed, hardly with any man. He was feeling very sore, and would fain have avenged his pain by making any one else feel equally sore, if he had it in his power to do so.

He was especially angry with Ludovico di Castelmare. Had he not chaffed him unmercifully about the verses he had sent to La Bianca? Was it not, to all appearance, due to him that the Diva had never condescended to cast a glance on either him or his poetry? Had he not called him Æsop, when it was plain to all the world that he represented Apollo? And now this night, again, he had taken the opportunity of turning him into ridicule in the presence of La Bianca; and he and she had spoken of the possibility of their being troubled with his company as of a nightmare. For the painful fact was that their uncomplimentary expressions had been heard by the poet; who, when he had left Ludovico and Bianca in the little supper-room together, had retreated no further than just to the other side of a curtain, which hung, Italian fashion, by the side of the open door. Finding that there was nobody there—for the little buffet was at the end of the

entire suite of rooms, and all those who were not either in the ball-room, or in the card-room, were at that moment in the principal supper-room—it had seemed well to the Conte Leandro, in his dudgeon and spite against all the world, to ensconce himself quietly behind the curtain, and hear what use Ludovico and Bianca would make of their *tête-à-tête*.

The first advantage he obtained was to hear himself spoken of as a nightmare; and that naturally prompted him to prick up his ears to hear more. But when he had thus learned the whole secret of the projected expedition, it struck him, as well worth considering, whether there might not be found in this the means of making his tormentor pay him for some of the annoyances he had suffered at his hands.

So! the Marchese Ludovico, who ought to be paying his addresses to the Contessa Violante in the sight of all Ravenna—the Contessa Violante Marliani was great niece of the Cardinal Legate, between whom and the Marchese Ludovico their respective families had projected an alliance—was, instead of that, going off on a *partie fine* with the notorious Bianca Lalli! A *tête-à-tête* in the Pineta! Mighty

fine, indeed! So sure, too, that nobody in the world would find them out on Ash Wednesday morning! And he is to be at her door at six o'clock in the morning! Very good! Capitally well arranged—were it not that Leandro Lombardoni may perhaps think fit to put a spoke in the wheel.

A little further consideration of the manner in which such spoke might be most effectually supplied, decided the angry and malicious poet—(poets, like women, will become malicious when scorned)—to seek out the Marchese Lamberto, whom he thought he should probably find in the card-room. For though the Marchese was no great card-player, and never touched a card in his own house, he was wont, at the *Circolo*, on such occasions as the present, to cast in his lot with those who so consoled themselves for the years that made the ball-room no longer their proper territory.

But the Conte Leandro did not find the Marchese among the card-players.

The events of the evening had already thrown him back again into a very miserable state of mind, from which the Marchese had been suffering such torments as the jealous only know, during all the latter half of the Carnival. It was strange that

such a man as the Marchese Lamberto—it would have seemed passing strange to any of those his fellow-citizens who had known him, thoroughly as they supposed, all his life; very strange that such a man, so calm, so judicious, so little liable to the gusts of passion of any sort; a man, the even tenor of whose well-regulated life had ever been such as to expose him rather to the charge of almost apathetic placidity of temper, should thus suddenly, in the full meridian time of his mature years, become subject to such violent oscillations of passion; to such buffetings by storms, blowing now from one and now from the opposite quarter of the sky. But no length of prosperous navigation in the quiet waters of a land-locked harbour will give evidence of the vessel's fitness to encounter the storms and the waves of the open sea. The storm-wind of a strong passion had, all at once for the first time, blown in upon the sheltered harbour in which that placid life had been led.

And yet that storm-wind did not produce the same effect, as it would have produced, and is seen to produce every day on the strong, wide-spread canvas of some young navigator on the ocean of life, putting out into the open waters at the time when such storms are frequent. Every day we see such

craft scudding with all sails spread before the blast without attempt at reefing or tacking. Right ahead they drive before the wind with no doubtful course. But it was not and could not be so in the case of the Marchese Lamberto. The whole habits of a life—the ways, notions, hopes, desires, ambitions, that time had made into a part of the nature of the man; the passions, which though calm and unviolent in their nature, had become strong, not by forcible energy, but by the deep and unconscious sinking of their roots into the depths of his character—all these things opposed a resistance to the new and suddenly-loosed passion-wind, such as that which the deep-rooted oak opposes to the tempest with no result of conquering it, only with the result of causing its own leaves and branches to be buffeted to and fro, torn, broken, and wrecked.

Thus it was that the unhappy Marchese was violently driven to and fro from hour to hour between the extremities of love and hate, till his brain reeled in the terrible conflict; and alternate attraction and repulsion bandied his soul backwards and forwards between them.

A ball-room is not a pleasant exercise-ground for a jealous man who does not dance. No "bolgia"

of the hell invented by the sombre imagination of the great poet could have surpassed, in torment, the *Circolo* ball-room on that last Carnival night to the Marchese Lamberto.

The sight of the sorceress who had bewitched him, as he watched her in the dance, had once again scattered to the winds all resolution, all hope of the possibility of escaping from the toils. What was all else that he desired to be put in comparison with that raging, craving desire that he felt and sickened with for her? That was what he really wanted—what he must have or die. It was madness to see her, as he saw her then, in the arms of other men, laughing, sparkling, brilliant with animation and enjoyment. Worst hell of all to see her thus with his nephew, her admiration for whom she had frankly confessed; whose ways with women he knew, and whose intimacy with Bianca had already become suspicious to him.

Yet not the less did he stand and gaze, as they danced together, clearly the handsomest and best-matched couple in the room—matched so admirably evidently by design and forethought.

He had seen Ludovico and Bianca leave the ball-room, after the last dance, together with the crowd

of most of those who had been joining in it, and had begun fluttering, poor moth, after the irresistible attraction, to follow them towards the supper-room. Missing sight of them in the throng for a minute, he had followed on to the principal supper-room, and not finding them there (for the reason the reader wots of) had returned on his steps, and was sitting on the end of a divan, by the door of the next room to the ball-room, through which all had to pass who wished to go thence to the supper-room. There were people passing through the centre of the room from door to door; but there was no other, save the Marchese, sitting down in it.

There the Conte Leandro found him, and came and sat down by his side; much, at first, to the Marchese's annoyance.

"What! you not in the supper-room, Signor Leandro. I thought your place was always there?" said the Marchese.

"I'm no greater a supper-eater than another; let them say what they please. But I have just been getting a glass of wine and a biscuit in the little supper-room at the further end there."

"What, are there two supper rooms? I did not know that!"

"Only a buffet in the little room at the end, where the papers generally are. It was mainly Ludovico's doing,—in order to have less crowd in the supper room,—and perhaps to have a quiet place for a *tête-à-tête* supper himself. Oh! I knew better than not to clear out, when he and La Diva Bianca came in; specially as there was nobody else there. Faith! I left them there alone together."

"Oh! that's where he is supping, then?" said the Marchese, in the most unconcerned tone he could manage.

"Yes; supping,—or enjoying himself in some other way, quite as delightful. The fact is, Signor Marchese," continued the poet, in a lowered voice, and rapidly glancing around to see that there were no ears within such a distance as to overhear his words,—"the fact is, that I am afraid Signor Ludovico is less cautious than it would be well for him to be, circumstanced as he is! I am sure I did not want to listen to what he and the Lalli were saying to each other. It is nothing to me. But they spoke with such little precaution, that I could not help overhearing what they said; and what do you think Ludovico is up to now?"

"How should I know!" said the Marchese, with

the tips of his pale lips; for he was grinding his teeth together to prevent them from chattering in his head.

"He is off at six o'clock to-morrow morning *tête-à-tête* with La Bianca, on an excursion to the Pineta. Coming it strong, isn't it?"

"To-morrow morning!" said the Marchese under his breath, and with difficulty; for his blood seemed suddenly to rush back cold to his heart, and he was shivering all over.

"*Niente meno!* I heard them arrange it all. He is to slip away from the ball presently, in order to make all needful preparations, and to be at her door with a *bagarino* at six o'clock in the morning. Doing the thing nicely, isn't it?"

For a minute or two the Marchese was utterly unable to answer him a word. His head swam round. He felt sick. A cold perspiration broke out all over him; and he feared that he should have fallen from his seat.

"He is a great fool for his pains," he said at last, mastering himself by a great effort, sufficiently to enable himself to utter the words in an ordinary voice and manner.

"Well, it seemed to me a mad scheme, con-

sidering all things. And the truth is, that I thought your lordship would very likely think it well to put a stop to it. And that is why I have bored your lordship by mentioning it to you."

"At six o'clock, you say?" asked the Marchese.

"Yes; that was the hour they fixed. Then he is to drive her to a farm-house on the border of the forest, leave the *bagarino* there, and go into the wood for a stroll. Not a bad idea for a wind-up of the Carnival, upon my word!"

"I think you have done very wisely and kindly in telling me this, Signor Conte," said the Marchese, in as quiet tones as he could command; "and if you will complete your kindness by saying no word of it to anybody else, I shall esteem myself much obliged to you."

"Oh! for that you may depend on me, Signor Marchese. I should never have thought of mentioning it to you, but for thinking that it would be a real kindness to Ludovico to put a stop to it."

"Thanks, Signor Conte. *A rivederla!*" said the Marchese, rising.

"*Felicissima notte,* Signor Marchese," returned Leandro, rising also, and bowing to his companion.

CHAPTER III.

ST. APOLLINARE IN CLASSE.

The Marchese remained at the ball to see one more dance between Ludovico and Bianca after their supper; and then left the rooms. There was nothing at all to cause remark in his thus retiring before the end of the evening. He never danced;—he happened not to be playing cards on that evening. It was quite natural that such a man should prefer going home to bed to remaining with the *jeunes gens* till the break-up of the ball.

How he enjoyed that last dance, which he stayed to see, the reader may perhaps imagine. Standing by a chimney-piece, on one corner of which he rested his elbow, he in great measure shaded his face with his hand, yet not so as to prevent him from seeing every movement of the persons, and every expression of the faces of the couple he was watching. There was a raging hell in his heart. And yet he stood there, and gazed eagerly, greedily one would

have said. And every minute, and every movement blasted his eyes, and stabbed his heart, and poured poison into his veins.

When the dance was over he did not move for some time; for he doubted his power to hold himself upright and walk steadily. Presently, however, when Ludovico and Bianca had again quitted the ball-room together, he gathered himself up, and moved slowly away, shaking in every limb, pale, fever-lipped, and haggard.

The man who gave him his cloak in the anteroom remarked to another servant, as soon as he was gone, that he would bet that the Marchese Lamberto would not be at the next Carnival ball.

At six o'clock, with wonderful punctuality for an Italian, Ludovico, with a neat little *bagarino* and fast-trotting pony, was at the door of the Diva's lodging. But Bianca was not ready. Her maid came down to the door with all sorts of apologies, and assurances that her mistress would be ready in a few minutes. The few minutes, however, became half an hour, as minutes will under such circumstances. And the result of this delay was that Ludovico and his companion were not the first travellers out of the Porta Nuova that morning.

During the whole of the past Carnival and the latter months of the previous year there had been living in Ravenna a young girl,—an artist from Venice, who had come to Ravenna with a commission given her by a travelling Englishman to make copies of some of the more remarkable of the very extraordinary and unique series of mosaics which exist in the old imperial city. She had brought with her a letter of introduction from her employer to the Marchese Lamberto,—a circumstance which had led to a degree of intimacy between the Marchesino Ludovico and the extremely attractive young artist, which threatened to stand more or less in the way of the match which had been arranged by the high-contracting parties between Ludovico and the Lady Violante, the great niece of the Cardinal. The girl's name was Paolina Foscarelli.

It is probable that in due time and season the reader may become better acquainted with Paolina. But at present there is no need of troubling him with more particulars respecting her than the above, save to mention that, having industriously and successfully completed the greater portion of her task in the churches within the city, she had determined to make her first visit to the strange old Basilica of

St. Apollinare in Classe, on that same Ash Wednesday morning. She did not purpose beginning her task there on that day; but intended merely to reconnoitre the ground, look to the needful preparations that had been made for her work, and ascertain how far the spot was within her powers of walking.

Paolina, too, had felt that the morning of Ash-Wednesday was a favourable time for the first experiment of an undertaking that a little alarmed her. For she also had calculated that on such a morning she should be little likely to meet anybody. It was just about six o'clock when Paolina started on her proposed walk; and she passed through the Porta Nuova, therefore, a little more than half-an-hour before Ludovico and his companion passed, travelling in the same direction.

The road, which it was necessary for her to follow in order to reach St. Apollinare in Classe, is the same for the whole of the distance between the city and the ancient church as that which Ludovico and Bianca would follow to reach the celebrated pine forest. The soil on which the forest stands is composed of the accumulation of sand which the rivers—mainly the Po—have brought from distant mountains,

and deposited in the bed of the Adriatic since the old church was built "in Classe,"—where the fleet once used to be moored. The building thus stands nearly at the edge of the forest, hardly more than a stone's throw from the furthest advanced sentinels of the wood. The road coming out from the city by the Porta Nuova, on its way to the little town of Cervia, a few miles to the southward, traverses ground once thickly covered with palaces, streets, and churches, —now open fields,—and passes by the western front and doorway of the almost deserted old Basilica, a little before it reaches the turning off towards the left, which enters the forest.

The walk before Paolina, when she had passed the city gate, was about two miles or rather more. So that had La Bianca taken a few less minutes to put the finishing touches to the charming morning toilette which replaced the gorgeous Venetian costume she had taken off, the *bagarino* which carried her and Ludovico would infallibly have overtaken the young artist. As it was, however, having more than half-an-hour's start of it, she reached the church before they came within sight of it.

Little Paolina had felt rather nervous when first stepping into the cool fresh morning air from the

door of the lodging she occupied. But the street was utterly empty, and she took courage. The first human beings she saw on her way were the *octroi* officers at the gate. They sat apparently half asleep at the doorway of their den, by the side of the city gate, wrapped in huge cloaks; and took not even so much heed of her as to say "Good morning."

The long bit of straight flat road outside the gate was equally deserted; and Paolina, braced by the morning air, stepped out vigorously, and began to enjoy her walk.

There is little enough, however, in the country through which she was passing to delight the eye. The fields in the immediate neighbourhood of the city are cultivated, and not devoid of trees. But the cheerfulness thence arising does not last long. Very soon the trees cease, and there are no more hedge-rows. Large flat fields, imperfectly covered with coarse rank grass, and divided by the numerous branches of streams, all more or less diked to save the land from complete inundation, succeed. The road is a causeway raised above the level of the surrounding district; and presently a huge lofty bank is seen traversing the desolate scene for miles, and stretching away towards the shore of the neighbour-

ing Adriatic. This is the dike which contains the sulkily torpid but yet dangerous Montone.

Gradually, as the traveller proceeds, the scene grows worse and worse. Soon the only kind of cultivation to be seen from the road consists of rice-grounds, looking like—what in truth they are—poisonous swamps. Then come swamps pure and simple, too bad even to be turned into rice grounds, —or rather simply swamps *im*pure; for a stench at most times of the year comes from them, like a warning of their pestilential nature, and their unfitness for the sojourn of man. A few shaggy, wild-looking cattle may be seen wandering over the flat waste, muddy to the shoulders from wading in the soft swamps. A scene of more utter desolation it is hardly possible to meet with in such close neighbourhood to a living city.

Paolina shivered, and drew her little grey cloak more closely around her shoulders; not from cold, though a bleak wind was blowing across the marshes. She was warmed by walking; but the aspect of the scene before her almost frightened the Venetian girl by the savagery of its desolation.

The raised causeway, however, keeps on its course amid the low-lying marshes on either side of it; and

presently the peculiar form of outline belonging to a forest composed entirely of the maritime pine is distinguishable on the horizon to the left. The road quickly draws nearer to it; and the large, heavy, velvet-like masses of dark verdure become visible. In a forest such as the famous Pineta, consisting of the maritime pine only, the lines, especially when seen at a distance, have more of horizontal and less of perpendicular direction than in any other assemblage of trees. And the effect produced by the continuity of spreading umbrella-like tops is peculiar.

Then, soon after the forest has become visible, the road brings the wayfarer within sight of a vast lonely structure heaving its huge long back against the low horizon, like some monster antidiluvian saurian, the fit denizen of this marsh world. It is the venerable Basilica of St. Apollinare in Classe.

Through all this dismal scene Paolina tripped lightly along with a quick step through the crisp morning air, no little awed by the dreary, voiceless desolation of it, but yet encouraged and not unpleased by the solitude of it.

The walk she found to be quite within her powers, at all events at that hour of the morning and in that season of the year; and when she stood before the

western door of the ancient church, in front of which the road passes, Ludovico and Bianca were only then on the point of starting from the quarters of the latter in the *Strada di Porta Sisi.*

Though knowing but little of the long and strangely diversified story which presses on the mind of a stranger read in history as he stands before the door of that desolate old church, Paolina could not but be much struck by the appearance of the building and of the scene around it. If ever a spot was expressive in every way by which a locality can speak to the imagination of the abomination of desolation, the view which spreads before the eye at the huge doorway of the Basilica of St. Apollinare in Classe is so. The general character of the country around it has been described. But the church itself is the most dreary and melancholy feature in the landscape. No desolation resulting solely from the operations of Nature, even in her least kindly mood, can ever suffice to speak to the imagination as the change and decay of the works of man's hand speak. To produce the effect of desolation in its highest degree man must have at some former period been present on the scene, and the remains of his work must be there to show that activity, life, energy, has

once existed where it exists no more. Nature is always and everywhere progressive, and no sentiment of sadness belongs to progress. Man's ruined work alone imparts the suggestion—(a delusive one, indeed, but most forcible,)—of falling back from the better to the worse.

Wonderfully eloquent after this fashion are the temples of Pæstum, far away there to the south beyond Naples, on the flat strip of miserably cultivated soil between the Apennines and the Mediterranean. But they are too far gone in ruin and decay to speak with so living a voice of sadness as does this old Byzantine church. The human element is at Pæstum too far away,—too utterly dead and forgotten. In St. Apollinare life still lingers. Life, flickering in its last spark, like the twinkling of a lamp which the next moment will extinguish, is still there. Life more suggestive of death, than any utter absence of life could be.

There are some dilapidated remains of conventual buildings on the southern side of the church, mean, and of a date some thousand years subsequent to that of the Basilica. They are nearly ruinous, but are still—or were till within a few years—inhabited by one Capucin friar, and one lay brother of the

order, whose duty it was to mutter a mass, with ague-chattering jaws, at the high altar, and act as guardians of the building.

Small guardianship is needed. The huge ancient doors—made of planks from vine trunks which grew fifteen hundred years ago on the Bosphorus—are never closed; probably because their weight would defy the efforts of the two poor old friars, to whom the keeping of the building is committed, to move them. But a poor and mean low gate of iron rails has been fitted to the colossal marble door-posts, which suffices to prevent the wandering cattle of the waste from straying into the church, but does not prevent the fever-laden mists from the marshes from drifting into the huge nave, and depositing their unwholesome moisture in great trickling drops upon the green-stained walls.

But not even the low iron gateway was closed when Paolina reached the church. It stood partially open. After having stood a minute or two before the building to look round upon the scene, Paolina stepped up to the gate and looked into the church, but could see no human being. Within, as without, all was utter death-like silence. She shivered, and drew her cloak more closely round her, as she stood

at the gate; for the healthy blood was running rapidly through her veins after her brisk walk, and the deadly cold damp air from the church struck her with a shudder, which was but the physical complement of the moral impression produced by the aspect of the place.

After a minute, however, wondering at the stillness, half frightened at the utter solitude, and awed by the vast gloomy grandeur of the naked but venerable building, she pushed the gate, and entered.

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER FABIANO.

Paolina entered hesitatingly, and starting at the echoes of her footsteps on the flagstones, wet and green, and slimy from the water, which often in every year lies many inches deep on the floor of the church. She advanced towards a small marble altar which stands quite isolated in the middle of the huge nave. And as she neared it she perceived, with a violent start, that there was a living figure kneeling at it. So still, so utterly motionless had this solitary worshipper been, so little visible in the dim light was the hue of the Franciscan's frock that entirely covered him, that Paolina had not imagined that there had been any living creature in the church. She saw, however, in the same instant that she became aware of his presence, that the figure was that of a Capucin friar, and doubted not that he must be the guardian of the church, whom she had been told she would find there.

The little low altar, of an antiquity coeval with that of the church, which stands in the centre of the nave, is the sole exception to the entire and utter emptiness of the place. There are, indeed, ranged along the walls of the side aisles, several ancient marble coffins, curiously carved, and with semi-circular covers, which contain the bodies of the earliest Bishops of the See. But the little altar is the sole object that breaks the continuity of the open floor. The body of St. Apollinare was originally laid beneath it, but was in a subsequent age removed to a more specially honourable position under the high altar at the eastern end of the church. There is still, however, the slab deeply carved with letters of ancient form, which tells how St. Romauld, the founder of the order of Camaldoli, praying by night at that altar, saw in a vision St. Apollinare, who bade him leave the world, and become the founder of an order of hermits.

It was on the same stones that the knees of St. Romauld had pressed, that the Capucin was kneeling, as Paolina walked up the nave of the church. The peaked hood of his brown frock was drawn over his head, for the air of the church was deadly cold, and the fever and ague of many a

successive autumn had done their work upon him. He was called Padre Fabiano, and was said to be, and looked to be, upwards of eighty years old. Probably, however, his age was much short of that. For the nature of his dwelling-place was such as to stand in the place of time, in its power to do worse than time's work on the human frame.

Of course, it can be no matter of question, *why* a monk is here or is there, does this or does that. Obedience to the will of his superiors is the only reason for all that, in the case of other human beings, depends on their own volition. The monk has no volition.

No human being who had, it might be supposed, would consent to live at St. Apollinare in Classe, with one lay brother for a companion, and discharge the duties assigned to the Padre Fabiano. But the question why his superiors sent him there, was still one that might suggest itself, though it was little likely ever to be answered. And the absence of all answer to such question was supplied by the gossips of Ravenna, by tales of some terrible crime against ecclesiastical discipline of which the Padre Fabiano had been guilty some sixty years or so ago. Certain it was that he had occupied his dreary posi-

tion for many years; and it was wonderful that fever and ague and the marsh pestilence had not long since dismissed him to the reward of his long penitence on earth.

He rose from his knees as Paolina approached him, and gravely bent his cowled head to her in salutation.

"You are early, Signora," he said. "I suppose you are the person for whom yonder scaffold has been prepared."

"Yes, father, I am the artist for whom leave has been obtained to copy some of your mosiacs."

"You will find it cold work, daughter. The church is damp somewhat. You would do better, methinks, not to begin your day's work till the sun has had time to warm the air a little."

"I had no thought, father, of beginning to-day. I have brought nothing with me. I only thought that I would walk out and have a look at the job before me. It is not so far from the city as I thought."

"It is far enough to be as lonely and as deserted as if it were a thousand miles from a human habitation," said the monk, looking into the girl's face with a grave smile.

"Yet you live here, from year's end to year's end all alone, *Padre mio*," said Paolina, timidly.

"Not quite so, daughter," replied he. "Brother Barnaba, a lay brother of our order, is my companion. But he is ill with a touch of ague at present."

"And how early would it be not inconvenient to you, *Padre mio*, to open the church for me?" asked Paolina.

"I spoke not of your being early on my account, daughter. If you come here at sunrise, you will find the gate open, and me where you found me this morning; and if you come at midnight you will find the same."

"At midnight, father!" said Paolina, with a glance of surprise and pity.

"Last October I was down with the fever," returned the monk; "but since that time I have not failed one night to be on my knees where the blessed St. Romauld knelt at the stroke of midnight. But I have not had his reward;—doubtless because I am not worthy of it."

"What was the reward of St. Romauld, father?" demanded Paolina.

"*His* midnight prayers were rewarded by the

vision of St. Apollinare in glory, who spoke to him, and gave him the counsel he sought. Night after night, and hour after hour, have I knelt and prayed. And I have heard the moaning of the wind from the Adriatic among the pines of the forest yonder, and I have seen the great crucifix above the high altar sway and move in the moonlight when it comes streaming through the southern windows; and sometimes I have hoped—and prayed—and hoped—but no vision came!"

The old monk sighed, and dropped his head upon his bosom; and Paolina gazed at him with a feeling of awe, mingled with a suddenly rising fear, that the tall and emaciated old man, whose light-blue eyes gleamed out from beneath his cowl, was not wholly right in his mind. She would have been more alarmed had she been aware that the old Padre Fabiano of St. Apollinare was generally considered in Ravenna to be crazed by all those who did not, instead of that, deem him a saint.

Before she had gained courage to answer him, however, he lifted his head, with another deep sigh, and said, in a very quiet and ordinary tone and manner,—

"Your scaffold is all prepared for you there,

Signora, according to the directions of the Signor Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare, who brought with him an order from the Archbishop's Chancellor. Will you look at it, and see if it is as you wish, and say where you wish to have it placed."

The mosaics in the apse of the centre nave are the most remarkable of those that remain at St. Apollinare, though many of the series of medallion portraits of the Bishops of the See from the foundation of it, which circle the entire nave, are very curious. Paolina had engaged to copy two or three of the most remarkable of these; but she intended to begin her work by attacking the larger figures in the apse. And the scaffolding had been placed there on the southern side.

"I think that is just where I should wish to have it," said Paolina, looking up at the vault. "If I may, I will go up and see whether it is near enough to the figure I have to copy."

"Do so, my daughter. It looks a great height, but I have no doubt that it is quite safe. The Signor Marchese was very particular in seeing to it himself. See, I will go up first to give you courage."

And so saying, the old man with a slow but firm step began to ascend the ladder of the scaffolding.

And when he had reached the platform at the top, Paolina, more used to such climbing than he, and who in truth had felt no alarm whatever, followed him with a lighter step.

"Yes, this will do nicely, *Padre mio!*" she said, when she had reached the top; "it is placed just where it should be, and this large window gives just all the light I want. It is a much better light than I had to work by in San Vitale."

"I never was in San Vitale," replied the monk. "I have been here fourteen years next Easter, and I have never once been in Ravenna in all that time, nor, indeed, further away from this church than just a stroll within the edge of the Pineta."

"That is the Pineta we see from this window, of course, *Padre mio.* What a lovely view of it! And how beautiful it is! Where does that road go to, Padre? To Venice?"

"No, *figliuola mia.* It goes in exactly the opposite direction, southwards, to Cervia. The Venice road lies away to the northward, through the wood that you can see on the furthest horizon. It was by that road I came to Ravenna. I shall never travel it again."

"From Venice, father? Did you come from Venice?" asked Paolina, eagerly.

"From La bella Venezia I came, daughter—fourteen years ago. And once in every month I indulge myself by going to the top of our tower—you can't see it from this window, it is on the northern side of the church—and looking out over the north Pineta as far as I can see towards it. May God and St. Mark grant that no tempter ever offer me the sight of Venice again at the price of my soul's salvation! I shall never, never see Venice more!"

"You must be a Venetian, father, surely, to love it so well?" said Paolina, after a minute or two of silence.

"A Venetian I am—or was, daughter; as I well knew you were when first you spoke. Might I ask your name?"

"Paolina Foscarelli, father. I am an orphan," said she, softly.

"No!" said the monk, shaking his head, with a deep sigh, and looking earnestly into the girl's face, but without any appearance of surprise,—"No; you are not Paolina Foscarelli."

"Indeed, father, that is my name," said Paolina, again recurring to her doubt whether the monk was altogether of sound mind, and speaking very quietly and gently; "my father's name was Foscarelli, and

the baptismal name of my mother was the same as mine—Paolina."

"Jacopo and Paolina Foscarelli, who lived in the little house at the corner of the Campo di San Pietro and Paolo," rejoined the monk, speaking in a dreamy far-away kind of manner.

"I have truly heard that they lived there," said she; "but I was only four years old when they died, one very soon after the other, and since that I have lived with a friend of my mother's, Signora Steno."

"The child of Jacopo and Paolina Foscarelli," said the monk, in the same dreamy tone, and pressing his thin emaciated hands before his eyes as he spoke; "and you have come here to find me?"

"Nay, father, not to find you. I knew not that the *padre guardiano* of St. Apollinare was a Venetian. I came only to copy these pictures for my employer."

"Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful are the ways of God! Paolina Foscarelli, daughter of Jacopo and Paolina, I Fabiano——"

"Look, *padre mio!*" cried Paolina, suddenly and sharply, turning very pale, and grasping the parapet rung of the scaffolding as she spoke, "look! in the *bagarino* there on the road, just passing the church; certainly that must be the Signor Marchese Ludovico!

—And with him—that lady ?—yes, it is—it certainly is La Lalli—the *prima donna*, who has been singing at the theatre this Carnival."

She pointed as she spoke to a *bagarino* that had just passed the western front of the church, and was now moving along the bit of road visible from the high window at which the monk and Paolina were standing.

The tone in which she spoke caused the friar to look at her first, before turning his glance in the direction to which she pointed. She was pale, and evidently much moved, after a fashion that, taken together with the nature of the objects to which she drew his attention, and the fact that it was the Marchese Ludovico who had come to St. Apollinare to make the arrangements needed for the artist's work there, left but little doubt in the old man's mind as to the nature of her emotion.

He looked shrewdly and earnestly into her face for a moment; and then turning his eyes to the stretch of road below, answered her:

"Certainly, my daughter, that is the Marchese Ludovico. The lady I never saw before as far as I am aware. They are going towards Cervia."

"No! See, father! They are turning off from

the road to the left. Where does that turning to the left go ?"

"Only into the forest, daughter,—or to that little farm-house you see there just at the edge of it. You may get as far as the sea-shore through the Pineta; but the road is very bad for a carriage."

"To the sea-shore!" said Paolina, dreamily.

"Yes, by keeping the track due east. The shore is not above a couple of miles away. But there is no port, or even landing-place there. And there are many tracks through the forest. You may get to Cervia, too, that way. But it is hardly likely that any one would leave the road to find a longer way by worse ways through the forest. More likely the object of the Signor Marchese is only to show the lady the famous Pineta."

Paolina, while the monk was thus speaking, had kept her eyes fixed upon the little carriage, which was making its way along a by-road constructed on the top of a dike by the side of one of the numerous streams that intersect all the district; and she continued to watch it till she saw it stop at the entrance to the yard of the little farm-house, to which the monk had called her attention. She then saw Ludovico and his companion descend from the

carriage, and leave it apparently in the charge of a man, who came out from the farm-yard. And they then left the spot where they had alighted on foot, and in another minute were no longer visible from the window at which Paolina and the monk stood.

"How long a walk is it, father, from here into the wood?" asked Paolina, musingly.

"It is a very short distance, daughter. There is a footpath practicable in dry weather like this, a good deal nearer than the road we saw the *bagarino* follow. You might get to the edge of the Pineta in that way in less than ten minutes."

"And would it be possible to return to the city that way, instead of coming back to the road?" enquired Paolina.

"Yes; for a part of the way there is a path along the border of the wood. Then you must fall back into the road. The way lies by the gate of the farm-house."

"I think I will go back to the city now, father. This scaffold is just where it will suit me. And to-morrow, a little later perhaps than this, I hope to come and begin my work. I shall have to come in a carriage, at all events, the first time, because of bringing my things. I am so much obliged to you,

father, for your kindness.. And I am so glad that you are a Venetian. I little thought to find a fellow-countrymen here."

"Or I to see this morning a Venetian—much less—but we will speak more of that another time—if you will permit an old man sometimes to speak to you when you are at your work?"

"*Ma come*—I can talk while I work. It will be a real pleasure to me to hear the dear home tongue. I will go down the ladder first. I am not the least afraid."

So Paolina left the church, and the monk stood at the yawning ever-open western door, looking after her as she took the path he had indicated to her towards the forest.

CHAPTER V.

"THE HOURS PASSED, AND STILL SHE CAME NOT."

There was misgiving in the heart of the old man as he stood at the door of the Basilica looking after the light lithe form of Paolina as she moved along the path, raised above the swamp on either side, that led towards the edge of the forest.

The rays of the sun slanting from the eastward lighted up all the path on which she was walking; and though the western front of the church was still in shade, had begun to suck up the mists, and to make the air feel at least somewhat more genial and wholesome. The monk pushed back the cowl of his frock, which had hitherto been drawn over his head, the better to watch the receding figure of the girl as she moved slowly along the path; and still, as he gazed after her, he shook his head from time to time with an uneasy sense of misgiving.

It was not that the mere fact of the girl's entering the Pineta alone seemed to him, accustomed as he

was to the place and its surroundings, to involve any danger to her of any sort, beyond, indeed, the possibility of losing herself for a few hours in the forest. The whole extent of it is very frequently traversed by the men in the employment of the farmers to whom the Papal government was in the practice of letting out the right of pasturage and management of the wood. And these people were all known. There were, it is true, encroachers on these rights, who might well be less known, and less responsible persons; and possibly the forest paths might sometimes be traversed by people bound on some errand of smuggling. But nothing had ever happened of late years in the forest to suggest the probability of any danger.

It was rather the nature of Paolina's own motives for her expedition, as they were patent to the old monk, that disquieted him on her behalf. He had marked the expression of her face when she had seen the *bagarino* with Ludovico and his companion pass along the road towards the forest, and the change in her whole manner after that. And monk, and octogenarian as he was, he had been at no loss to comprehend the nature of the emotions which had been aroused in her mind by the sight. And he

feared that evil might arise from the collision of passions, which it seemed likely were about to be brought into the presence of each other.

Perhaps, monk and aged as he was, the apprehensions with which his mind was busy seemed more big with possible evil than they might to another. Perhaps it was so long since he had had aught to do with stormy passions that the contemplation of them affrighted his stagnant mind all the more by reason of the long years of passionless placidity to which it was accustomed. Perhaps he had known passions stormy enough in the long long past, and had experience of the harvest of evils which might be expected to be produced by them.

Report said, that when Father Fabiano had been sent by his superiors to occupy the miserable and forlorn sentinel's post at the church-door of St. Apollinare, amid inundations in winter, and fever and ague in summer, his appointment to the dreary office had been of the nature of a penance and an exile. It was said, too, that the sentence of exile, which placed him in his present position, had been an alleviation of a more rigorous punishment; that he had been allowed, after a period of many years of imprisonment in a monastery of his order at Venice, to change that

punishment for the duty to which he had been appointed, and which would scarcely have seemed an amelioration of destiny to any one save a man who had for years been deprived of the light of the sun and the scent of the free air. Some deed there had been in that life which had called for such monastic discipline; some outcome of human passion when the blood, that now crept slowly, while the aged monk passed the hours in waiting for visions before the altar of St. Apollinare, was running in his veins too rapidly for monastic requirements.

It was evident from the few words that he had let drop, when he became aware who the young Venetian visitor to the church under his care was, that some special circumstances caused him to feel a more than ordinary interest in her. Some connection there must have been between some portion of his life and that of some member or members of her family. Of what nature was it? Monkish tribunals, however else they may treat those subjected to them, at least keep their secrets: Frailties must be expiated; but they need not be exposed. And the true story of the fault which condemned Father Fabiano to end his days amid the swamps of St. Apollinare, as well as the precise nature of the connection which

had existed between him and Paolina's parents, can be only matter of conjecture.

Paolina, as has been said, pursued her path slowly. She had tripped along much more lightly on her way from the city to St. Apollinare. And yet she was urged on by a burning anxiety to know whither Ludovico and Bianca had gone, and for what purpose they had come thither. But, despite this nervous anxiety, she stepped slowly, because her heart disapproved of the course she was taking. It seemed as if she was drawn on towards the forest by some mysterious mechanical force, which she had not the strength to resist. Again and again she had well nigh made up her mind to turn aside from the path she was following. She would go only a few steps further towards the edge of the forest. She looked out eagerly before her, standing on tip-toe on every little bit of vantage ground which the path afforded. She would only go as far as that next bend in the path. But the bend in the path disclosed a stile a little further on, from which surely a view of all the ground between the path she was on and the farm-house at which Ludovico and his companion had descended, might be had. She would go so far and no further. And thus, poor child, she went on and

on, long and long after the monk had lost sight of her, and with a deep sigh, had turned to go back again into the church.

It had been six o'clock when Paolina started on her walk to the church, and nothing had been settled with any accuracy between her and the old friend and protectress, with whom she had come to Ravenna, and lived during her stay there, as to the exact time at which she might be expected to return. The name of the protectress in question was Signora Orsola Steno, an old friend of her mother's, who, when Paolina Foscarelli had been left an orphan, had, for pure charity and friendship's sake, taken the child, and brought her up. Latterly, by the exercise of the talent inherited from her father, Paolina had been able to do something, not only towards meeting her own expenses, but towards making some return for all that the good Orsola had done for her out of her own poverty. And now this commission of the Englishman who had sent her to Ravenna would go far towards improving the prospects of both Paolina and her old friend.

Old Orsola did not know exactly at what time to expect Paolina back; but she knew that Paolina's purpose on that Ash-Wednesday morning was merely

to walk to the church, and, having seen the preparations that had been made for her work, to return, without on that occasion remaining to begin her task. So that when the hour of the midday meal arrived, and her young friend had not returned, old Orsola began to be a little uneasy about her.

Nor was her uneasiness lessened by her entire ignorance as to there being little or much, or no cause at all for it. Never having left Venice before in her life, old Orsola was as much a stranger in Ravenna, and felt herself to be in an unknown world, as completely as an Englishman would in Japan. Since she had been in Ravenna she had frequently heard the Pineta spoken of, and the old church out there in which her young friend was to do a portion of her task. But she had heard them both mentioned as strange and wild places, not exactly like all the rest of the world. And the old woman felt that, for aught she knew, this Pineta, and the old church in the wilderness on the borders of it, might be a place full of dangers for a young girl all by herself.

And as the hours crept on, and no Paolina came, her uneasiness increased till she felt it impossible to sit quietly at home waiting for her any longer.

She must go out, and—do what? The poor old woman did not in the least know what do do; or of whom to make any inquiry. The only person with whom the two Venetian strangers had become at all intimate in Ravenna was the Marchese Ludovico. And the only step in her difficulty which old Orsola could think of taking, after much doubt and hesitation, was to go to the Palazzo Castelmare, and endeavour to speak with the Marchesino. The letter of introduction, which they had brought from the English patron, was addressed to the Marchese Lamberto. But the acquaintance of the Venetians with him had remained very slight; and Orsola felt so much awe of so grand and reverend a Signor, that it was to the nephew only that she thought of applying.

So, not without much doubt and misgiving, the old woman put on her bonnet and cloak and made the best of her way to the Castelmare palace. There she found a porter lounging before the door, to whom she made her petition to be allowed to speak to the Signor Marchese Ludovico.

"My name is Orsola Steno," said the old woman humbly, a little in awe of the majestic porter, chosen for that situation for his size; "and the Signor

Marchesino knows me very well. I am sure he would not refuse to see me."

Insolent servants in a great house are generally a sure symptom of something amiss in the moral nature of their masters. Good and kindly masters have and make civil and kindly servants; and the big porter of the *palazzo* Castelmare was accordingly by no means a terrible personage.

"Signora Orsola Steno! To be sure. I remember you very well, Signora, when you called on the *padrone* last summer. I am sure the Signor Marchesino would have pleasure in seeing you, if he were at home. But he is not here. And to tell you the truth, we have no idea where he is. He came home early this morning after the ball, and instead of going to bed, changed his dress, and went out again at once; and has not been back since. Some devilry or other! *Che vuole!* We were all young once upon a time, eh, Signora Orsola? And as for the Marchesino, he is as good a gentleman as any in Ravenna or out of it, for that matter. But he is young, Signora, he is young! And that's all the fault he has. Can I give him any message for you, Signora?"

"The fact is," said old Orsola, after a few

moments of rapid reflection as to the expediency of telling her trouble to the porter, and a decision prompted by the good-natured manner of the man, and by the poor woman's extreme need of some one to tell her trouble to,—"the fact is, that I wanted to ask the advice of the Signor Marchesino about a young friend of mine, the Signora Paolina Foscarelli, who went out of the city early this morning to go to St. Apollinare in Classe, and ought to have been back hours ago. And I am quite uneasy about her."

"Why, your trouble, Signora, is of a piece with our own," said the porter, with a burly laugh; "and it seems to me like enough we can help each other. You miss a young lady; and we miss a young gentleman. When I used to go out into the marshes a-shooting with the Marchese, we used to be sure, when we had put up the cock bird, that the hen was not far off; or, if we got the hen, we knew we had not far to look for the cock. Do you see, Signora? Two to one the pair of runaways are together; and they'll come home safe enough when they've had their fun out. I dare say the Signor Marchesino and the Signorina you speak of are old friends?"

"Why, yes, Signore. For that matter they are

—old friends!" replied Orsola, adopting the porter's phrase for want of one which could express the meaning she had in her mind more desirably.

"To be sure—to be sure. And if you will take my advice, Signora, you will go home, and give yourself no trouble at all about the young lady. Lord bless us! what though 'tis Lenten-tide? Young folks will be young, Signora Orsola. They'll come home safe enough. And maybe I might as well say nothing to the Signor Marchesino about your coming here, you know. When folks have come to that time of life, Signora, as brings sense with it, they mostly learn that least said is soonest mended," said the old porter, with a nod of deep meaning.

And Signora Orsola was fain to take the porter's advice, so far as returning to her home went. But it was not equally easy to give herself no further trouble about Paolina. It might be as the porter said; and if she could have been sure that it was so the old lady would have been perfectly easy. But it was not at all like Paolina to have planned such an *escapade* without telling her old friend anything about it. She felt sure that when Paolina said she was going to St. Apollinare to look after the pre-

parations for her copying there, she had no other or further intention in her thoughts. To be sure there was the possibility that Ludovico might have known her purpose of going thither, and might have planned to accompany her on her expedition, without having apprized her of any such scheme. And it might not be unlikely that in such a case they had been tempted to spend a few hours in the Pineta. And with these possibilities Signora Steno was obliged to tranquillize herself as she best might.

She returned home not without some hope that she might find that Paolina had returned during her absence; but such was not the case—Paolina was still absent. And though it was now some eight or nine hours from the time she had left home, old Orsola had nothing for it but to wait for tidings of her as patiently as she could.

CHAPTER VI.

GIGIA'S OPINION.

THE aged monk of St. Apollinare, after watching Paolina as she departed from the Basilica, and took the path towards the forest, returned into the church to his devotions at the altar of the saint, as has been said. But he found himself unable to concentrate his attention as usual, not on the meaning of the words of the litanies he uttered,—*that,* it may be imagined, few such worshippers do, or even attempt to do,—but on such devotional thoughts as, on other occasions, constituted his mental attitude during the hours he spent before the altar.

He could not prevent his mind from straying to thoughts of the girl who had just left him; of certain long-sleeping recollections of his own past, which her name had recalled to him; of her very manifest emotion at the sight of the couple in the *bagarino,* and the too easy interpretation of the meaning of that emotion; and specially of her implied intention of taking the same route that they had taken.

He thought of these things, and a certain sense of uneasiness and misgiving came over him. The young artist had spoken kindly and sweetly to him. She had seemed to him wonderfully pretty,—and that is not without its influence even on eyes over which the cowl had been drawn for more than three-score years; she was a fellow-Venetian too,—and that with Italians, who find themselves in a stranger city, is a stronger tie of fellowship than the people of less divided nations can readily appreciate; and, above all, there were motives connected with those awakened remembrances of the old man which made her an object of interest to him. And the result of all this was, that he was uneasy at seeing her depart on the errand on which he suspected that she had gone.

After awhile he arose from his knees, and, returning to the great open door of the church, stood awhile irresolutely gazing out towards the forest to the southward. He could not see the farmhouse, which has been so frequently mentioned, from where he stood, because it is to the eastward of the church. After awhile he strolled out and along the road, till he came in sight of the house on the border of the forest. But there was no human being

to be seen. Then, apparently having taken a resolution, he went into the dilapidated remains of the old convent, and ascended a stair to the room where his sole companion, the lay brother, was ill in bed. He gave the sick man a potion, placed a cup with drink by his side, smoothed his pillow, and replaced a crucifix at the bed-foot before the patient's eyes; and then, with a word of consolation, descended again to the road, and after another long look towards the forest, slowly moved off towards the nearest border of it.

It was between eight and nine when Father Fabiano, moving slowly and irresolutely, thus sauntered off in the direction of the forest; but it was nearly time for him to sound the "Angelus" at midday before he returned.

Perhaps it was the fear that he might be late for this duty,—a task which devolved on him, the lay brother being ill,—that made his steps, as he returned, very different from those with which he had set forth. He came back hurrying, with a haggard, wild terror in his eyes, shaking in every limb, and with great drops of perspiration standing on his brow. One would have said that all this evident perturbation could not be caused only by the

fear of being late to ring the "Angelus." His first care, however, was to pay another visit to his patient.

"Ah! Padre, you are going to have your turn again. It is early this year. All this wet weather. Why, your hand is shaking worse than mine!" said the sick man, as the old monk handed him his draught.

And it was true enough that not only Father Fabiano's hands were shaking, but he was, indeed, trembling all over; and any one but a sick man, lying as the fevered lay-brother was lying, could not have failed to see that it was from mental agitation, rather than from the shivering of incipient ague, that he was suffering.

"You think of getting well yourself, brother Simone. I have not got the fever yet," said the monk, making an effort to control himself and speak in his ordinary manner.

"May the saints grant that your reverence do not fall ill before I am able to get up, or I don't know what we should do."

"It is years, brother Simone, that make my hand shake, more than ague this time,—years, and many a former touch of the fever. I am not ill

this time yet. And now I must go and ring the 'Angelus.'"

And the old monk did go, and the "Angelus" was duly rung. But Brother Simone, as he lay upon his fevered bed, was very well able to tell that the rope was pulled by a very uncertain and unsteady hand.

"Poor old fellow! he's going fast! I wonder whether there's any chance of their moving me when he's gone?" thought Brother Simone to himself.

But Father Fabiano, for his own part, judged that prayer and penance were more needed for the healing of his present disorder, than either bark or quinine. And when he had rung the bell, he betook himself again to the altar of St. Apollinare, and with cowl drawn over his head, and frequent prostrations till his forehead touched the marble flags of the altar-step, spent before it most of the remaining hours of that day. Nevertheless, it was true that, be the cause what it might, the aged friar was ill, not in mind only, but also in the body. And before the hour of evensong came,—his coadjutor, *Fra* Simone, the lay-brother, being by that time so much better as to be able to crawl out,—Father Fabiano was fain to stretch himself on the pallet in his cell. And *Fra* Simone took it quite as a matter of course in the

ordinary order of things, that the father was laid up in his turn with an attack of fever and ague.

It was much about the same time that Father Fabiano had set out on that walk to the forest, from which he had returned in such a state of agitation, that old Quinto Lalli, the prima donna's travelling companion, was made acquainted with the *escapade* of his adopted daughter. Though she bore his name, the fact was that the old man was in no way related to the famous singer. But they had lived together in the relationship first of teacher and pupil, and then of father and daughter, by mutual adoption ever since the first beginning of the singer's public career; and they mutually represented to each other the only family ties which either of them knew or recognized in the world. The old man had been several hours in bed, when Bianca had returned from the ball, at about five in the morning of that Ash-Wednesday. And it was not till he came from his room, between eight and nine, that he heard from Gigia, Bianca's maid, that her mistress had not gone to bed, but had only changed her dress, and taken a cup of coffee before going out with the Marchese Ludovico more than an hour ago in a *bagarino*.

There was nothing sufficiently strange to the

former habits of his adopted daughter in such an *escapade,* or so unlike to many another frolic of the brilliant Diva in former days, as to cause any very great surprise to the old singing-master—for such had been the original vocation of Signor Lalli. Yet he seemed on this occasion to be not a little annoyed at what she had done.

"And a very great fool she is for her pains," cried the old man, with an oath; "it is just the last thing she ought to have done—the very last. I really thought she had more sense!"

"I am sure, Signor Quinto, she has not had one bit of pleasure all this Carnival. A nun couldn't have lived a quieter life, nor more shut up than she has. With the exception of the old gentleman and the Marchese Ludovico, she has never seen a soul!"

The old gentleman thus alluded to, it may be necessary to explain, was the Marchese Lamberto.

"And where's the use of never seeing a single soul, if she throws all that she has gained by it away in this manner?"

"Why, Santa Virgine, Signor Quinto! Where's the harm? Isn't the Signor Ludovico the old one's own nephew?" expostulated Gigia shrilly.

"The old one, as you call him, is not a bit the

more likely to like it for that. It is just the very last thing she should have done. I do wonder she should not have more sense," grumbled Quinto.

"Misericordia! why what a piece of work about nothing! The old gentleman will never know anything about it, you may be very sure. He is safe enough in bed and asleep after his late hours, you may swear. Besides, it's both best and honestest to begin as you mean to go on, and accustom him to what he's got to expect," said Gigia, fighting loyally for her side.

"All very well in good time. But it would be as well for Bianca to make sure first what *she* has got to expect."

"Why, you don't suppose, Signor Quinto, nor yet that old Marchese don't suppose, I should think, that he's going to marry a woman like my mistress, to keep her caged up like a bird that's never to sing, except for him?"

"I tell you, Gigia, and you would do well to tell her, and make her understand, that she is not Marchesa di Castelmare yet, and is not likely to be, if this morning's work were to come to the ears of the Marchese. It is just the very worst thing she could have done; and I should have thought she

must know that. I had rather that she should have gone with any other man in the town."

"I am sure," said Gigia, with a virtuous toss of the head, "she would not wish to go with any one of them."

"And she *would* wish to go with the Marchese Ludovico! There's all the mischief. Just what I am afraid of. I tell you, Gigia, that if the Marchese Lamberto hears of her going off in this manner with his nephew, the game is all up. He would never forgive it."

"You will excuse me, Signor Quinto," said Gigia, with a demure air of speaking modestly on a subject which she perfectly well understood—"You will excuse me, if I tell you that I know a great deal better than that. There's men, Signor Quinto, who are in love because they like it; and there's others who are in love whether they like it or no, because they can't help themselves!"

"And you fancy the Marchese Lamberto is one of those who can't help himself, eh?" grumbled Quinto discontentedly.

"If I ever saw a man who was so limed that he couldn't help himself, it's that poor creature of a Marchese! He's caught safe enough, you may take

my word for that, Signor Quinto. He's caught, and can't budge, I tell you—hand nor foot, body nor soul! Lord bless you, I know 'em. Why, do you think he'd ever have come near my mistress a second time if he could have helped himself? He's not like your young 'uns, who come to amuse themselves. Likely enough, he'd give half of all he's worth this day never to have set eyes on her; but, as for giving her up, he could as soon give himself up!"

"Humph!" grunted the old singer, with a shrug, and a sound that was half a sneer and half a chuckle. "I suppose he don't above half like the price he has to pay for his plaything! But that don't make it wise in Bianca to drive him to the wall more than need be. Limed and caught as he is, he's one that may give her some trouble yet. For my part, I wish she had not gone on this fool's errand this morning. Now, I will go and get my breakfast. I shall be back in half-an-hour. I expect Signor Ercole Stadione here this morning."

Signor Ercole Stadione was the *impresario* of the Ravenna theatre.

"And if he comes before you are back, Signor Quinto?" asked Gigia.

"If he should come before I am back, let the boy call me from the café. And, Gigia, whenever he comes, you can let him understand, you know, that your mistress is in her own room,—resting after the ball, you know. He's hand and glove with the Marchese."

"I wasn't born yesterday, Signor Quinto, though you seem to think so," returned Gigia, as the old man began to descend the stairs.

Signor Quinto went to the café, and consumed his little cup of black coffee, with its abominable potion of so-called "rhum" in it, and the morsel of dry bread, which constituted his accustomed breakfast; and then, as he was returning to his lodging, encountered the "impresario" in the street.

"Well met, Signor Lalli!" cried little Signor Ercole, cheerily. "I was on my way to your house to settle our little matters. I have not seen you, I think, since Sunday night. The bustle of these last days of the Carnival! How divinely she sang that night! If Bellini could have heard her, it would have been the happiest day of his life."

"I am glad that you were contented, Signor Ercole."

"Contented! The whole city was enraptured.

There never was such a success. You have got that little memorandum of articles—— ?"

"No. I've got the paper signed at Milan; but not——"

"Stay, let me see. True, true. I remember now. It remained with the Marchese. We shall want it, you know, just to put all in order. We can call at the Palazzo Castelmare on our way, and ask the Marchese for it?"

"Will he be up at this hour, after last night's ball?" asked Quinto.

"He? The Marchese? One sees you are a stranger in Ravenna, my dear sir. I don't suppose the Marchese has ever been in bed after eight o'clock for the last quarter of a century. He is an early man, the Marchese,—an example to us all in that, as in all else."

"Very well; then we can call for the paper on our way to my lodging; it is not much out of the way."

So they walked together to the Palazzo Castelmare, talking of the brilliant success of the past theatrical season, and of the eminent qualities and virtues of the Marchese Lamberto; and when they reached the door the *impresario* desired the servant

who answered the bell to tell the Marchese that he, Signor Ercole, wished to speak with him, but would not detain him a moment.

The Marchese, the man said, was not up yet. He, the servant, had been to his door at the usual hour, but had received no answer to his knock; so that it was evident that his master was still sleeping. He had been very late the night before,—far later than was usual with him,—and no doubt he would ring his bell as soon as he waked.

"The fact is," said Signor Ercole, as he and Quinto Lalli turned away from the door, "that the Marchese has not been well of late. He very often does me the honour of conversing with me,—I may say indeed of consulting me on subjects of art,—and I grieve to say that I have of late observed a change in him. He is not like the same man."

"Getting old, I suppose, like the rest of us," said Quinto.

"Like some of us," corrected Signor Ercole; "but, Lord bless you! the Marchese is a young man —a young man, so to speak,—he's not above fifty, and a very young man of his years;—at least he was so a month or two ago. But changed he is. Everybody has seen it. Let us hope that it is

merely some temporary indisposition. Ravenna can't afford to lose the Marchese."

"I suppose we had better put off settling our little bit of business till another time?" said Quinto.

"Shall we say to-morrow, at the same hour? And I will get that paper from the Marchese in the meantime," returned Signor Ercole.

"That will suit me perfectly well; to-morrow, then, at my lodgings at ten, shall we say?"

"At ten; I will not fail to wait upon you, Signor Lalli, at that hour. In the meantime I beg you to present my most distinguished homage to the *divina Cantatrice*," said the little *impresario*, taking off his hat and holding it at arm's length above his head, as he made a very magnificent bow.

"*Servitore suo, stimatissimo Signor Ercole! A dimane!*" replied old Quinto, as he returned the *impresario's* salutation, with a slighter and less provincial bow.

"*A dimane alle dieci!*" rejoined the *impresario*; and so the two men parted.

"Not a bad bit of luck," thought the old singing master to himself, as he sauntered towards his lodging, "that the Marchese should be in bed this morning. It gives a chance that he may never hear

of this mad *scappata* with the Signor Ludovico. Lose the Marchese Lamberto! No, per Bacco! there are other people, beside the good folks of the city of Ravenna, who can't afford to lose the Marchese Lamberto just yet!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN ATTORNEY-AT-LAW IN THE PAPAL STATES.

At a little after twelve o'clock on that same Ash-Wednesday morning, a servant in the Castelmare livery brought a verbal message to the "studio" of Signor Giovacchino Fortini, "procuratore,"—attorney-at-law, as we should say,—requesting that gentleman to step as far as the Palazzo Castelmare, as the Marchese would be glad to speak with him.

The message was not one calculated to excite any surprise either in the servant who carried it, or in Signor Fortini himself. Signor Giovacchino was, and had been for many years, the confidential lawyer of the Castelmare family. And the various business connected with large landed possessions made frequent conferences necessary between the lawyer and such a client as the Marchese, who, among his other activities, had always been active in the management and care of his estates.

Signor Giovacchino Fortini was very decidedly

the first man of his profession in Ravenna, as indeed might be expected of the person who had been honoured for more than one generation by the confidence of the Castelmare family. For the lawyer was a much older man than the Marchese, and had been the confidential adviser of his father. And old Giovacchino Fortini's father and grandfather had sat in the same "studio" before him, and had held the same position towards previous generations of the Castelmare family.

For three generations also the Fortini, grandfather, father, and son, had been lawyers to the Chapter of Ravenna; a fact which vouched the very high standing and consideration they held in the city, and at the same time explained the circumstances under which it had come to pass that the "studio" they had occupied for so many years, seemed more like some public building than the private offices of a provincial attorney.

In fact the "Studio Fortini" was a portion of an ancient building attached to the Cathedral, in which some of the less dignified members of the Chapter had their residences. The building in question encircled a small cloistered court, the soil of which was on a lower level than that of the street outside

it; and the residences, to which a series of little doors around this cloister gave access, looked as if they must have been miserably damp and unwholesome. But the "Studio Fortini" was not situated in any part of this damp lower floor. In the corner of the cloister nearest to the Cathedral, there was a wide and picturesque old stone staircase, which led to an upper cloister, as sunny and pleasant looking as the lower one was the reverse. There, near the head of the stair, was a round arched deeply sunk stone doorway, closed by a black door, bearing a bright brass plate on it, conveying the information, altogether superfluous to every man, woman, and child in Ravenna, that there was situated the "Studio Fortini."

This black door was never quite closed during the day. It admitted anybody who chose to push it into a small ante-room, on one side of which might be seen through a glass door a long low vaulted room, or gallery rather, running over some half dozen of the inhabited cells below. And along the whole length of it on either side, up to the height of the small round arched windows placed high up in the wall, were ranges of shelves occupied by many hundreds of volumes, all of the same size, and all

bound alike in parchment, with two red bands of Russian leather running across the backs of them, and all lettered and dated in black ink, of gradually shaded degrees of fadedness. The place looked like the archive-room of some public establishment, which kept its archives in very unusually good order.

All these were the documents and pleadings in all the lawsuits and other legal transactions of all the clients of the three generations of the Fortini. And it would not have been too much to say, that Signor Giovacchino Fortini would have deemed the destruction of this mass of papers as a misfortune to be paralleled only by that of the Alexandrian library.

On the opposite side to the long gallery the ante-room gave access to a large and lofty vaulted chamber, about one-sixth part of the space of which—that is, a third of the floor and a half of the height—was partitioned off by a slight modern wall and ceiling. Two young clerks occupied the larger unenclosed portion of the large hall,—for such its size entitled it to be called,—and Signor Fortini's senior and confidential clerk sat on the top of the ceiling, which enclosed the smaller portion. A small wooden stair gave access to this lofty position, which was admirably

adapted for keeping an eye on the youngsters on the floor below. Under the same ceiling, in the snug little room thus divided off, sat Signor Fortini himself. And a very snug and bright-looking little room it was, with a pretty stone-mullioned three-lighted casement window opening to the south; and in the wall at right angles to it another window, offering accommodation of a much more unusual and peculiar kind. It opened, in fact, into the transept of the cathedral, and had been intended to enable the occupier or occupiers of the apartment, now inhabited by the lawyer, to enjoy the benefit of attending mass without the trouble of descending into the church for that purpose. If Signor Giovacchino Fortini did not often use it for that purpose, it, at all events, had the effect of imparting an ecclesiastical air to his *habitat*, which seemed to have a certain propriety in the case of a gentleman whose business connections with the hierarchy were so close, and unquestionably added to the savour of unimpeachable respectability which appertained to Signor Fortini and all belonging to him.

Signor Fortini was a tall, thin, adust old man, with a large, well-developed forehead, a keen, bright hazel eye, and bristling, iron-grey hair, which had

once been black, and a beard to match, which seemed as if the barber entrusted with the care of it were always two or three days in arrear with his work. By some incomprehensible combination of circumstances it seemed as if Signor Fortini's face were never seen fresh shaven. His sharp chin and lanthorn jaws appeared to be perennially clothed with a two days' old crop of grisly stubble,—two days' growth,—neither more nor less!

Long years ago he had buried a childless wife, who was said to have been a wonderful beauty, and to have been in many ways a trouble greater than Signor Fortini knew how to manage, and a trial that made his life a burthen to him. Those old troubles were now, however, long since past and gone; and Signor Fortini lived only for his law and his artistic and antiquarian collections. He was like many of his peers in the provincial cities of the Papal dominions—a great antiquary and virtuoso. Antiquarianism is a "safe" pursuit under a government the nature of which makes and finds very many intellectual occupations unsafe. And this may account for the fact, that very many competent historical antiquaries and collectors are found in the Pope's territories among such men as Signor Fortini.

The son and grandson of thriving lawyers, who had for nearly an hundred years managed the affairs of the Chapter and the estates of the principal landed proprietors of the neighbourhood, was not likely to be otherwise than well off; and it was generally understood that Signor Fortini was a wealthy man. He loudly protested on all occasions that this was a most mistaken notion; but there never occurred an opportunity of adding to his very remarkable collection of drawings of the old masters, or his unrivalled series of mediæval seals, or his all but perfect library of the Municipal Statutes of the mediæval Communes of Italy, which found Signor Fortini unprepared to outbid most competitors.

There were very few among his clients whom Signor Fortini would not have expected to call on him at his "studio," instead of summoning him to wait on them. But the Marchese di Castelmare was one of these few,—perhaps as much, or more, on the score of old friendship as on that of rank and social importance.

The old lawyer was not more importantly occupied when he received the Marchese's message, than by intently examining a bronze medal through a magnifying-glass; and he sent back word that he would

be with the Marchese immediately. The fact was he did not like the look of this summons at all. He, too, had observed the unmistakable change in his old friend; and jumped to the conclusion that what he was wanted for was to make, or to be consulted about making, the Marchese's will.

"To think of his breaking up so suddenly, in such a way as this. No stamina! Why, he must be twenty years my junior; and I don't feel a day older than I did ten years ago, not a day. He has led a steady life too; and seemed as likely a man to last as one would wish to look at. I suppose everything will go to the nephew,—legacies to servants, and something, I should not wonder, to the town hospital,—not that I think he can have saved much, if any thing. I should like that little cabinet Guido and I don't suppose Signor Ludovico would care a rush about it."

With these thoughts in his mind Signor Fortini presented himself at the door of the Castelmare palace within ten minutes of the time when he had received the summons of the Marchese, and was immediately ushered into the library.

A bright ray of sunshine was streaming in at the large window, and flooding half the room with its

comfortable warmth and cheerful light. But the Marchese, though he held a *scaldino* (a little earthenware pot filled with burning braise) in his hand, and was apparently shivering with cold, sat in his large library-chair, drawn into the darkest corner of the room, cowering over this *scaldino,* which he held between his knees. He jumped up from his seat, however, to receive his visitor with an air, one would have said, of having been startled by his entrance.

"It is kind of you to come to me so quickly, Signor Giovacchino," he said; and then turning angrily to the servant, who was leaving the room, added in a cross and irritable voice, very unlike his usual manner, "Why are not those *persiane* shut? Close them directly, and then begone—quick!"

The man, with a startled look, did as he was bid; and the heavy wooden jalousies thus shut reduced the room to comparative darkness.

"I am afraid I find you very far from well, Signor Marchese. Would not a little sun be pleasant this bright morning? the air is quite fresh despite the sunshine."

"I don't like the sun indoors! I don't know how my rascals came to leave the *persiane* open."

"I thought you seemed cold, Signor Marchese," said the lawyer, kindly

"So I am cold—very cold," he said, and his teeth chattered as he said it; "but the light hurts my eyes."

"It very often does so when one is not well."

"Not well! I'm well enough, man alive. But I think I must have caught a little cold at the ball last night," rejoined the Marchese, striving hard to speak in his usual manner.

The lawyer, whose eyes had by this time become accustomed to the diminished light, looked hard at his old friend from beneath his great shaggy black eyebrows, with a shrewdly examining glance, and then slightly shook his head.

"Well, I daresay you'll be all right again in a day or two. But any way, I am glad you sent for me all the same. These things have to be done, you know. And a man does not die a bit the sooner for doing them. For my part, I always advise my friends to have all such matters settled while they are in health."

"What, in Heaven's name, are you talking about? I don't know what you mean," said the Marchese, with an angry irritability that was totally

unlike his usual manner. I sent for the lawyer; and you come and talk to me as if you wanted to play the doctor."

"I assure you, Signor Marchese, I have not the slightest desire to play any part but my own. And that I am perfectly ready to enter on. I am ready to take your instructions, and will draw up the instrument to-morrow or the next day. Thank God there is no cause for hurry. And that is one of the advantages of arranging all testamentary dispositions while we are in health. My own will, Signor Marchese, has been made these ten years."

"What is that to me? I may make my will ten years hence, and yet get it done in quite as good time as you have, Signor Fortini. Pray allow me to judge for myself, when I think it right to make my will. I have usually been able to manage my own affairs."

He spoke with a degree of anger and petulance, jumping up from his chair, and taking a turn to the window and back again, which seemed to conquer the shivering fit from which he had been suffering.

"Manage your own affairs, Signor Marchese! Who would dream of interfering with your management of them? But did you not send for me to

make your will?" said the lawyer, standing also.

"Send for you to make my will! No. Who the devil told you I wanted to make my will? I said nothing about making my will."

"I beg your pardon, Signor Marchese. Perhaps I jumped at a conclusion over hastily. I thought it a wise thing to do, and so imagined that you were going to do it;—that's all. Let us say no more about it. What commands have you then to give me?"

The Marchese took another turn across the room before replying; and the observant lawyer saw him, when his back was turned, pass his hand across his brow, with the action of one ill at ease. Then resuming his seat, and motioning the lawyer to take a chair, he said:—

"If you will take a chair, Signor Giovacchino, I will tell you the business for which I have sent for you. I have thought it my duty—family considerations—in fact, I've been thinking on the subject for a long time—in short, Signor Fortini, I am about to be married."

"Whew—w—w!" whistled the lawyer, without the least attempt at concealing the extremity of his

astonishment; and pushing back his chair a couple of feet, as he raised his head to stare into his companion's face.

"And pray, Signor, what is there to be astonished at in such an intention?" said the Marchese, evidently wincing under the lawyer's look.

"I beg your pardon, Signor Marchese, but—the fact is—one is always astonished at what one does not expect, you know. You may depend on it, I am not one bit more astonished than every human being in Ravenna will be," said the lawyer, looking hard at him.

"I am not aware, Signor Fortini, that I have to answer to any one save myself for the wisdom of my resolution," said the Marchese, with a dignity more like his usual manner than he had yet spoken.

"Certainly not, Signor Marchese. Certainly not. But the exception is an important one. You *will* have to answer for the wisdom of your resolution to yourself," rejoined Fortini, drily.

"That, Signor Fortini, is my affair. As I told you, I have considered the matter well; and I have made up my mind."

"May I ask, Signor Marchese, whether your

intention has been communicated to your nephew?" asked the lawyer.

"As yet I have announced it to no one save yourself. As soon as the necessary arrangements with regard to matters of property have been determined on, it will be the fitting time to do so."

"Before any word can be said on that head, of course, it is necessary that your lordship should mention, what you have not yet confided to me,—the name of the lady with whom you are about to ally yourself."

"Of course; and it is for the purpose of doing so that I have requested your presence here this morning, Signor Fortini. Before naming the lady, I will merely remark to you, that a man at my time of life may be expected to know his own mind, and has a right to please himself. And bearing these remarks in mind, you will understand that I do not wish to hear any observations on the subject of the choice I have made. My choice *is* made; and that is sufficient."

The Marchese looked up into the lawyer's face, and paused for some reply to these preliminary observations before proceeding to tell his secret; but

the lawyer maintained a look and attitude of silent expectation.

"It is my intention," proceeded the Marchese, "to marry the Signora Bianca Lalli;—the lady whose conduct, as well as her talent, has won the good opinion of the entire city."

The old lawyer flung down on the table, with a clatter, a paper-knife which he had taken into his hand while speaking, and rising abruptly from his chair, took one or two turns across the room before he answered a word. Then coming in front of the Marchese, and still continuing to stand, he said,—

"You have warned me, Signor Marchese, not to make any remarks on the communication you have just made to me. There is one, however, which perforce I must make. It is that I must decline to take any instructions, or to act in any way, for the forwarding of such a purpose."

"There are other attorneys in Ravenna, Signor Fortini."

"Plenty, Signor Marchese; plenty who will be abundantly ready to do your bidding. But Giovacchino Fortini will not. Good heaven! I should expect to have my dear and honoured

old friend and patron, your father, coming out of his grave to upbraid me. Signor Marchese, you know right well—as well as I do myself—that at this time of day, I don't care two straws, as a mere matter of gain, whether I continue to be honoured with the transaction of your legal affairs or not. But I do care on other grounds. And I do implore you to believe that I am speaking to you more as a friend than as a lawyer;—that I am speaking to you as the whole city would speak, and will speak when it hears of this—this incredible—this monstrous notion,—when I entreat you to think yet further on this most disastrous purpose."

Of course when a man speaks as Signor Fortini spoke to the Marchese, he does it not without some hope that his words may produce an effect on the person he addresses. But the lawyer had not much expectation that in the present case what he said would be listened to. He spoke more for the discharge of his own conscience, and because the feelings he expressed were strong within him, than for any other reason. And he fully expected that he should be answered with words of anger and uncompromising rejection of his interference.

It was not without considerable surprise, therefore,

that he heard the Marchese's moderate answer to the strong opposition he had offered to his intention.

"Well, Signor Fortini, I cannot doubt that what you have said has been, at all events, dictated by a strong regard for my welfare, as you understand it. I have, as I told you, made up my mind upon the subject. Nevertheless, counsel cannot but be useful, and it is well not to be precipitate. I will, therefore, so far accept your advice as to promise you that I will give myself time to deliberate yet further on the step. In the meantime you will note that my first communication to you on the subject was made on this first day of Lent; so that when I again seek your assistance in the matter, you will know that I have at least not acted in a hurry, but have given myself due time for mature reflection."

"I am delighted, Signor Marchese, to have obtained from you at least thus much. It is at all events something gained. And I shall still hope, that further reflection may lead you to change your purpose. Hoping that, I shall, you may depend upon it, breathe no word of what you have said to me to any living soul. But you must understand that, without such hope, I should have deemed it my duty to speak on the subject with the Marchese Ludovico."

"How so, Signor Fortini? A lawyer——"

"Very true, Signor Marchese. A lawyer, as you would observe, is addressed by his client in confidence, and the confidence should be sacred. But you must remember that I have the honour to act in this, as I and my father have done on all other occasions for now three generations, not only for your lordship, but for the whole of the family. I am the legal adviser of the Marchese Ludovico, as I was his father's, and as I am yours. It is my duty, therefore, as I understand it, to look upon myself as bound to consider the welfare and interests of the entire family; and I need not remark to you how cruelly those of the Marchese Ludovico would be compromised by such an event as we were contemplating just now."

"With regard to speaking to my nephew on the subject, Signor Fortini, I can have no objection to your doing so, if you think it your duty. He will, of course, be informed of my intention by myself. Do not forget, however, that my first communication to you on this subject was on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday."

"Forget it, Signor Marchese! I am not likely to forget it for a long time to come, I assure you," said the lawyer, not a little surprised.

"I mention it because I am anxious that you should not accuse me of acting with precipitancy in this matter; that when I shall renew my application to you, you may remember that I have had due and sufficient time for reflection. Addio, Signor Giovacchino," said the Marchese, reverting to the more friendly form of address; "*addio, ed à rivederci fra poco!*"

"*Servo suo, Lustrissimo Signor Marchese. A rivederci!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

SIGNOR FORTINI went straight home to his pleasant little snuggery under the wing,—it might almost be said, under the roof,—of the Cathedral, and sat down in his easy chair to resume the occupation that had been interrupted by the summons from the Marchese. He took up the medal he had been examining, and the magnifying glass, in a manner that implied a sort of ostentatious protest to himself that the calm and even tenour of his own life and occupations was not to be disturbed from its course by all the follies and extravagances of the world around him.

But "mentem mortalia tangunt!" The glass was soon laid aside: the medal remained idly in his hand, and his mind would recur to the things he had just seen and heard.

That an old bachelor should be caught at last by a pretty face, and make a fool of himself in his

mature age, was no unprecedented phenomenon. That a man, who had never in any way made a fool of himself at the proper age for such an operation, should, after all, do so when those who did so in their salad days have become wise, was not unheard of. Nevertheless, Signor Fortini, who, in the course of his seventy years, had had a tolerably wide experience of mankind, was astonished that the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare should have been tempted to act as he proposed to act.

"The very last man," said Signor Fortini musingly to himself, "that I could have suspected of such a thing! The man who has the highest reputation in the city for sound judgment and unexceptionable conduct, to turn out the greatest fool! An old ass! How little he dreams of what he is bringing upon himself. Let alone the terrible fall, the disgrace,—in every way, disgrace and contempt and ridicule! It seems impossible, even now, that he should be in earnest. He must be mad! And, *davvero*, his manner was at times so strange, that I could almost believe he really is not quite in his right mind. Very strange his manner was,—very! And very ill he looked, too. Everybody has been saying that he looked ill,—that he looked old,—that

there must be something wrong with him. Wrong with a vengeance! So this was the cause of it all: the Marchese Lamberto is in love! Bah!—Bah!!—Bah!!!—(with crescendo expression of disgust). Poor devil! Well, I was in love once, or fancied myself so. But then I was twenty-five years old. *Un altro paio di maniche!* And I very soon found out my mistake. But he, at his time of life! And such a woman! Well, the Emperor Justinian married Theodora. So, I suppose we Ravennati have authority for madness in that kind. And that poor good fellow, the Marchese Ludovico, too! It is too bad. And all because such a creature as that is cunning enough to know how to drive a hard bargain for the painted face she has to sell. But that is the sort of woman who can make that sort of conquest. A good woman now, who would have made him an honoured and good wife, would never have made such a blind, abject slave of him. He is bewitched! He is mad! and ought not to be allowed to carry out so insane a project! Perhaps it may still be possible to induce him to hear reason. It was very odd, that way, that just at last he promised me he would think of it again before he finally decided. Very odd. Just as if a man has not finally decided in such a

matter before he sends to his lawyer! It is all very —very strange. And I have a good mind to speak to Signor Ludovico at once. I think it would be the right thing to do,—I do think that would be the most proper thing to do. The old fool ought to be treated as one *non compos!*"

And then the old lawyer, after spending nearly an hour in such musings, got up and went to his house, —not two minutes' walk from his "studio"—to his solitary but comfortable two-o'clock dinner.

By the time he had finished his repast, he had made up his mind that he would at once confer with the Marchese Ludovico on the subject of his uncle's disastrous project. It was by that time nearly half-past three; and Signor Fortini walked out towards the Circolo, having little doubt that he should find Ludovico there at that hour.

But on his way thither he met the man he was in search of in the street. The young Marchese was walking at a hurried pace, and appeared to be scared, troubled, and heated. Nothing could be more unlike his usual easy, lounging, *poco-curante* bearing. The lawyer saw at once that something was the matter; and thought that, in all probability, the Marchese Lamberto had been already forestalling him, by

speaking to his nephew himself on the subject of his projected marriage.

"Oh, Signor Ludovico," said Fortini, as he met him, "I was on my way to the Circolo, on purpose to see if I could meet with you there."

"Why, what is it? Have you any news to tell me?" said the young man in a hurried manner, that the lawyer thought odd.

"Yes. I wished to speak to you on rather an important matter. Have you seen the Marchese Lamberto this morning?"

"No. I have been out of the town. I am but this moment come back," replied Ludovico, evidently anxiously.

"I should be glad to speak to you for a few minutes before you go to the Palazzo Castelmare. If you are going to the Circolo, I would walk with you, and we could speak there," said Fortini.

"I'll be there in less than ten minutes. But I want first to run just as far as La Lalli's lodging in the Strada di Porta Sisi, only to ask a question," said Ludovico.

"La Lalli again! The devil fly away with her! It was about her that I wanted to speak to you," said the lawyer.

"What about her? Have you seen her? Do you know where she is?" asked Ludovico, hurriedly and anxiously.

"I seen her! No. Where she is? In her bed most likely, after dancing all last night, I should think!"

"Well, I must run and just ascertain whether she is at home!" said Ludovico, again trying to escape.

But the old lawyer, partly put a little bit out of temper by the young man's evident wish to get rid of him, partly angered by finding the nephew thus running after the same mischief that was threatening to ruin his uncle, and partly thinking that it was desirable that the news he had to tell should be told before Ludovico should come to speech with his uncle, was determined not to let him escape till he had said what he had to say.

"Very well, Signor. I can say what I have to say in the street as well as anywhere else. Though I confess I expected a somewhat more ready reception of information which concerns you nearly, Signor Marchese, and which I am prompted to tell you by my interest in your welfare. Listen! Your uncle sent for me this morning for the purpose of

announcing to me his intention of marrying this Bianca Lalli!"

"So I have been told this very morning," said Ludovico.

"I thought you said that you had not seen your uncle this morning!" returned the lawyer.

"No more I have; but are there not two persons from whom such an intention may be learned?" said Ludovico, with a slight approach to a sneer.

"The lady, you mean?" said Fortini.

"Exactly so—the lady!" rejoined Ludovico.

"The lady herself told you that the Marchese Lamberto had proposed marriage to her?" persisted the lawyer.

"The lady herself told me so," replied the Marchese.

"But I thought you said that you had only just now returned to the city?" objected the lawyer again.

"Really, Signor Fortini, one would think that I was being examined before a police-magistrate! However, since my tongue has let the cat out of the bag, you may take the creature, and make the most of her! I did receive the intelligence in question from the lady concerned, and I have just returned

to the city. She communicated the fact to me during a little excursion we made together to the Pineta this morning, after the ball. Now you know all about it," said Ludovico, still in a hurry to get away.

"Not quite!" rejoined Fortini, quite imperturbably. "If you went to the Pineta with her—(did anybody ever hear of such a mad thing?)—and returned this morning, how can you want to go now to her house to ask whether she is there?"

"Because, you very clever inquisitor, though I went to the Pineta with her, I did not say that I had come back with her."

"The deuce you did not! Did another gentleman undertake the duty of escorting the lady back to town? It is all exceedingly pleasant for the Marchese Lamberto, upon my word!—oh, exceedingly!—and really a foretaste to him of the joys to come, quite frankly offered to him on the part of the lady!" sneered the old lawyer.

"Pshaw! how she may have come back, or with whom, I don't know, and can't guess; and that is just what I am anxious to find out," said Ludovico, in provoked impatience.

"I don't understand. Where did you part with the lady?" persisted the lawyer, interested rather

by the evident uneasiness of the Marchese Ludovico, than by any care how and in what company Bianca might have found her way back to the city.

"Well, that's just the curious part of the matter. If you want to know how the thing happened, since you know so much already, walk with me to the Strada di Porta Sisi, and I will tell you how it happened. At the ball we spoke of the Pineta,—she had never seen it,—asked me to show it to her. In short, we agreed to start on leaving the ball, instead of going to bed. I got a *bagarino*, and drove her to the farmhouse by the edge of the wood, just behind St. Apollinare; left the *bagarino* there, and strolled into the wood. It was there that she told me of my uncle's purpose. And I was not a little taken aback, as you may suppose. However, that is matter for talk by-and-by. We strolled about a good while, then sat down. She told me a good deal of the history of her life. We must have been talking—I don't know how long; but a long time. Then she said she was so sleepy, she must have a little sleep; she could keep her eyes open no longer. Natural enough! She had been dancing all night—had never closed her eyes for a minute since. The bank we were sitting on was the most delicious

place for a *siesta* that can be conceived. In two minutes she was fast asleep. She slept on and on till I was tired of waiting. No doubt I should have slept too, had not the intelligence she had given me been of a sort to keep me waking, for one while at least. Having my mind full of this, and not being able to sleep, I strayed away from her, and returned in a few minutes, as I think, to the place where I had left her,—but could not find her. I could not be sure about the place. One bit of the forest is so much like another,—just the same thing over and over again,—that I could not feel quite sure of the spot. I still think I went back to the right place; but there she was not. Then I searched the wood all round, far and near, for, I should think, a couple of hours or more. I called aloud, again and again, all to no purpose. And what on earth has become of her I cannot imagine."

"And why you need trouble your head about it, I don't see. I wished the devil might fly away with her just now! And if the devil has taken the hint and done so, I confess it seems to me about the best thing that could happen! Why on earth you, of all people in the world, Signor Ludovico, should be so anxious to recover the lady, I confess I cannot under-

stand. Would it not be the best thing in the world for you if she were never heard of again?"

"Oh, *per amore di Dio*, Signor Giovacchino, don't talk in that way. Never heard of again! I shall be really uneasy if I don't hear of her again in a very few minutes. It is so extraordinary. What can have become of her?"

"Become of her! Why, she waited, of course: got tired of waiting for you, and so strolled back to the town. That sort of lady does not much like waiting, I fancy."

"That sort of lady does not much like walking so far as from the Pineta here, I fancy. Besides, I should have overtaken her on the road."

"In any case what is there to be uneasy about. No harm can have happened to her. No such luck, *per Bacco!*"

"Harm! No; no *harm* can have happened to her, beyond losing herself in the forest. What I am afraid of is that she has strayed and not been able to find her way. And God knows how far she may wander. When I tell you that in wandering away from the place where I left her, for not above a quarter of an hour, I lost my way, and that when I found, as I supposed, the place where we

had been, I could not be sure whether it was the same spot or not; you may suppose how easy it is to lose oneself. And I don't suppose the poor girl would be able to walk very far. If she has not returned, I must get help and go back to the forest and search till I find her."

"It's far more likely that you will find that she has returned home. I wish, for my part, that she had never set foot within a dozen miles of Ravenna. Just think what it would be! But I trust—I trust we may yet be able to induce your uncle to listen to reason."

"I'll tell you what, Signor Fortini. I should not be surprised if it should be found more possible to make the other party hear reason."

"What, the lady!"

"Yes, the lady—if we set about the matter in the right way."

"Well, Signor Ludovico, it may be that you may understand such matters and such people better than I can pretend to do. It is not improbable. But my conceptions of the power of persuasion have never risen yet to a belief in the possibility of persuading a dog who has got a lump of butter in his mouth to relinquish it."

"Umph! you are not particularly gallant, Signor Giovacchino. We shall see. But all that must be matter for future conversation. Here we are at her door. Let us see if anything has been heard of her."

Ludovico, leaving his companion for an instant in the street, sprang up the stairs to make inquiry; and in the next minute returned looking very much vexed and annoyed, with the information that nothing had been seen or heard of the Diva since she left the house in his company at an early hour that morning.

CHAPTER IX.

"PASSA LA BELLA DONNA E PAR CHE DORMA."

—*Tasso.*

"WHAT'S to be done now? I absolutely must find her," said Ludovico, looking, as he felt, exceedingly puzzled and annoyed.

"Well, yes. Considering the nature of the information she gave you this morning, and bearing in mind that her existence in the flesh promises to be the means of leaving you without the price of a crust of bread in the world, and the further fact she was last seen starting on a *tête-à-tête* expedition with you at six o'clock in the morning, I admit that it *is* desirable that you should find her," said the lawyer, with somewhat grim pleasantry.

"For heaven's sake, Signor Giovacchino, don't talk in that sort of way, even in jest," replied the young man, looking round at the lawyer with an uneasy eye. "After all, nothing can have happened to her, you know, worse than losing herself in the Pineta."

"Pooh! happen to her. What should happen to her? Either you did not go back to the place where you left her; or, likely enough, after strolling a little away from it, and not finding you, she sat down, and two to one, fell asleep again. I would wager that she is, at this moment, fast asleep under the shadow of a pine-tree, making up for last night."

"But what had I better do? If she is still either sleeping or waking in the forest, I must find her."

"Let us just step as far as the gate, and make some inquiry there. If she returned to the city she must have come to the Porta Nuova. And she could hardly have entered the town without drawing the attention of the men at the gate. Just let us make inquiry there in the first place."

So they went together to the Porta Nuova, and nothing more was said between them during the short walk. But it seemed as if the manifest uneasiness of Ludovico had infected his companion. Yet it was evident that thoughts of a different nature were busy in their minds. The Marchese Ludovico pressed on faster than the old lawyer could keep up with him; and was very unmistakably anxious about the object of his quest, and the tidings which he should be able to hear at the gate.

Signor Fortini had apparently got some other and newly-conceived thought in his mind. He looked two or three times shrewdly and furtively into the face of the young Marchese; and closely compressed his thin lips together, and drew into a knot the shaggy eyebrows over his clear and thoughtful eyes. Some notion had been suggested to his mind which very plainly he did not like.

At the gate nothing had been seen of the object of their search. The *octroi* officers perfectly well remembered seeing the Marchese Ludovico, who was well known to them by sight, drive through the gate very early that morning in a *bagarino* with a lady. One man had recognised the lady as the *prima donna* at the opera. And they were very sure that she had not returned to the city since, at least by that gate.

But one of the officers volunteered the information that another young lady had that morning passed out of the city on foot a little before the time at which the *bagarino* had passed with the Marchese and the *prima donna*. And the men, after some consultation together, were sure that neither had that young lady returned by the gate they guarded.

Ludovico looked at the lawyer, and the lawyer looked at Ludovico; but neither of them could suggest anything in explanation of so strange a circumstance.

"I saw nothing of any such person either in the Pineta or on the road," said Ludovico. "Who could it have been?"

The old lawyer only shrugged his shoulders in reply.

"There *is* a young lady," resumed Ludovico, after some minutes of thought, "a friend of mine—a young artist engaged in making copies from the mosaics in our churches. I know that it was her purpose shortly to begin some work of this kind at St. Apollinare in Classe. It may be that she had selected this morning for the purpose of going out to look at her task,—though I almost think that I should have been informed of her intention."

"The plot seems to thicken with a vengeance," said the lawyer, with an impatient shrug, and a slight sneer of ill-humour, provoked by the multiplicity of his young client's lady friends. "I daresay," he added, "the young ladies are not playing hide-and-seek in the Pineta all by themselves."

"But what had I better do?" said the young

Marchese, looking with increased anxiety into the lawyer's face; "the fact is—you see, Signor Giovacchino, this new idea, this possibility that Paolina—that is the young artist's name—may be—may have been in the forest—in short, I feel more uneasy than before till I can learn what has become of both of them."

"Do you mean," said the lawyer, with a sneer in his voice, but at the same time looking into his companion's face with a shrewd expression of investigation in his eye,—"do you mean that the two ladies may possibly have fallen in with each other, and may in such case not improbably have fallen out with each other? You know best, Signor Marchese, the likelihood of any trouble arising out of such a meeting."

"For God's sake don't speak in such a tone, Signor Giovacchino. I tell you I am seriously uneasy. Should they have met under such circumstances—God only knows—— What would you advise me to do, Signor Giovacchino?" said the Marchese, looking into the lawyer's face with increasing and now evidently painful anxiety.

"It is ill giving advice without knowing all the circumstances of a case, Signor Marchese," returned

Fortini, somewhat drily, looking hard at the young man as he spoke, and putting a meaning emphasis on the word "all."

"You do know all the circumstances as far as I know them myself. The thing happened exactly as I told you," replied Ludovico.

"You left her sleeping on a bank in the forest, and have never seen her since?" said the lawyer, thoughtfully.

"Exactly so! I returned to the spot where I had left her—at least as far as I could tell it was the same spot—and she was no longer there," replied Ludovico.

"But you were not *sure* that you did return to the same spot? You could not recognise it again with certainty?"

"So it seemed to me when I was there. I *think* it must have been the same place. But when I did not find her, I could not feel sure of it. Every spot in the Pineta is so like all other spots. One pine-tree is just like another; and the grassy openings, and the little thickets of underwood, are all the same over and over again. I felt that I could not be sure that the place was the same."

"Was there no fallen tree, no track of road, no

specialty of weed or flower, that the spot might be identified by?"

"None I think—none that I am aware of or can remember. There was a little rising of the ground —a sort of bank, and the grass was sprinkled all over with wild flowers. There were violets close at hand, I know, because I remember the scent of them! But when I came to try, it seem'd to me that I found all these things in a dozen other places."

"Nevertheless, you know at what point you entered the Pineta; it cannot be very difficult to have the whole wood, within such a distance as it is at all likely that she should have strayed to, thoroughly searched. But the best men for the purpose would be some of the foresters in the employ of the farmers of the forest. I dare say that we might find—what is that coming along the road yonder?" said the lawyer interrupting himself.

The two gentlemen had been standing during the above short conversation just on the outside of the gate, and looking down the stretch of long straight road towards St. Apollinare and the pine forest.

"It is a knot of men coming along the road. They are likely enough some of the very fellows we

want. In that case we might get them to go back with us without loss of time."

"With *us?*" said the lawyer, who had not bargained when he left his home, for any such expedition. "Well, I don't mind helping you, Signor Marchese, in your search," he added, after a moment's consideration; "but I am not going to walk to the Pineta this afternoon; and I should think you must have had enough of it for to-day. But I will tell you what I can do. We will send one of these fellows to my house to order my servant to come here with my *calessino* as quick as he can; and if these men are the people we want—What are they doing? They are carrying something! Why surely—Signor Marchese!" said the old lawyer, looking into his companion's face, while a strange expression of understanding, mixed with a blank look of dismay and alarm, stole over his own features.

"What is it?—What have they got?—Why, heavens and earth! it is—Signor Fortini, is it not a dead body they are carrying? My God!"

The young man griped his companion's arm hard, as he spoke, and the action enabled the lawyer to remark that he was shaking all over.

In another minute the men whom they had seen

coming along the road were close to the gate. They were six in number; and they were bearing—somewhat, between them. They advanced beneath the covered gateway, and there, as it is necessary to do in the case of everything brought into the town, they set their burthen down on the flag-stones, at the feet of the officers of the gate, and of the Marchese and the lawyer.

Their burthen was a door lifted from its hinges, and supported by three slender stakes drawn green from a hedgerow. And on the door there lay, covered with a sheet, what was evidently a dead body.

Ludovico, with his eyes starting from his head, and horror in every feature of his face, still clutching one hand of the old lawyer in his, stretched forward with one advanced stride towards the extemporized bier, and with his other hand lifted the sheet.

A shriek of horror burst from him. "*Ah! Paolina mia!*" he cried aloud; and then with a deep groan, as of one in physical pain, he fell into Signor Fortini's arms, and sunk in an insensible state of sick faintness on the flag-stone pavement beneath the old gateway.

BOOK II.

FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THAT ASH WEDNESDAY MORNING.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE GOOD NEWS CAME TO RAVENNA.

SUCH were the events of that last night of carnival, and of the Ash-Wednesday that followed it;—an Ash-Wednesday remembered many a year afterwards in Ravenna.

The old lawyer, Fortini, standing a pace behind the Marchese Ludovico, when the latter lifted up the sheet from the face of the dead, saw only that it was the face of a woman. Paolina Foscarelli he had never seen; and Bianca Lalli he had seen only once or twice on the stage; the lawyer not being much of a frequenter of the theatre. There could be little doubt that the body lying there beneath the gateway, with the officials standing with awe-stricken faces around it, together with the six peasants who had brought it thither, was that of one or other of those two young women.

Of course there were plenty of persons at hand who were able to set at rest all doubt as to the

identity of the murdered woman,—for such it was pretty clear she must be considered to be. And of course all interests in the little provincial city were for many days to come absorbed in the terrible interest belonging to the investigation of the foul deed which had been done.

But in order to set before the reader the whole of this strange story intelligibly, and to give him the same means of estimating the probabilities of the questions involved in it, and of reaching a solution of the mysterious circumstances which the authorities, who were called upon to investigate them, were in possession of, it will be expedient to go back to a period some four months previous to that memorable Ash-Wednesday.

* * * *

It was a bitterly cold night in Ravenna, towards the latter end of November, some four months before that Ash-Wednesday on which the events that have been narrated occurred. Untravelled English people, who have heard much of "the sweet south," of the sunny skies of Italy, and of its balmy atmosphere, do not readily imagine that such cold is ever to be found in that favoured clime. But the fact is that cold several degrees below the freezing point is by no

means rare in the sub-Alpine and sub-Apennine districts of northern Italy.

And Ravenna is a specially cold place. At Florence, the winter, though short, is often sharp enough; and the climate of the old Tuscan city is considered a somewhat severe one for Italy. But the district which lies to the north-eastward, on the low coast of the upper part of the stormy Adriatic, is much colder. There is nothing, neither hill nor forest, between the Friulian Alps and Ravenna, to prevent the north-eastern winds, bringing with them a Siberian temperature, from sweeping the low shelterless plain on which the ancient capital of the Exarchs is situated.

They were so sweeping that plain, and howling fiercely through the deserted streets of the old city, on the November evening in question.

Nevertheless there were several persons loitering around the door of that ancient hostelry, the "Albergo della Spada," in the Via del Monte, then as now, and for many a generation past, the principal inn of Ravenna. They were wrapped in huge cloaks, most of them with hoods to them, which gave the wearers a strange sort of monkish appearance. And they from time to time blew upon their fingers,

in the intervals of using their mouths for the purpose of grumbling at the cold. But they none of them resorted to tramping up and down, or stamping with their feet, or threshing themselves with their arms, or had recourse to movement of any kind to get a little warmth into their bodies, as Englishmen may be seen to do under similar circumstances. However cold it may be an Italian never does anything of this sort. It must be supposed, that to him cold is a less detestable evil than muscular exertion of any kind.

There were some half-dozen men standing about the door; and though they were doing nothing, it was not to be supposed that they stood there in the bitter cold for their own amusement. The fact was, they were waiting for one of the great events of the day at Ravenna,—the arrival of the *diligenza* from Bologna. It was past six o'clock in the evening; and it could not now be long before the expected vehicle would arrive.

It is a distance of some sixty miles from Bologna to Ravenna; the diligence started at five in the morning, and was due at the latter city at five in the evening. But nobody expected that it would reach its destination at that hour. It had never done so

within the memory of man, even in the fine days of summer; and now, when the roads were rough with ridges of frozen mud! It was now, however, nearly half-past six—yes, there went the half-hour clanging from the cracked-voiced old bell in the top of the round brick tower, which stands on one side of the cathedral, and by its likeness to a minaret reminds one of the Byzantine parentage of its builders.

Half-past six! The loiterers about the inn door remark to each other, that unless "something" has happened old *Cecco Zoppo* can't be far off now.

The arrival of the Bologna diligence, the main means of communication between remote out-of-the-way Ravenna and the rest of the world, was always a matter of interest in the old-world little city, where matters of interest were so few. And on a pleasant evening in spring or summer the attendance of expectant loungers was wont to be far larger than it was on that bitter November night, and to include a large number of amateurs; whereas the half-dozen now waiting were all either officially or otherwise directly interested in the arrival. Indeed, there was a very special interest attached to the coming of the expected vehicle on that November night; and nothing but the extreme severity of the weather

would have prevented a very distinguished assemblage from being on the spot to hear the first news that was expected to be brought by one of the travellers.

"Eccolo! I heard the bells, underneath the gateway. *Per Bacco,* it is time! I'm well-nigh frozen alive," said Pippo, the ostler.

"If they don't keep him an hour at the gate," rejoined a decidedly more ragged and poverty-stricken individual, who held recognized office as the ostler's assistant.

"Not such a night as this! Those gentlemen there at the gate can feel the cold for themselves, if they can't feel nothing else," rejoined the ostler, who was a frondeur and disaffected to the government, in consequence of a drunken grandson having been turned out of the place of third assistant scullion in the kitchen of the Cardinal Legate. "There's the bells again! They've let him off pretty quick. I thought as much," added the old man, with a chuckle.

"Wasn't Signor Ercole's woman here with a lanthorn just now?" said another of the bystanders, a young man, who, though wrapped to the eyes in the universal all-levelling cloak, belonged evidently to a superior class of society to the previous speakers.

"*Si*, Signor Conte, she is there in the kitchen. *Per Dio!* she would have had no fingers to hold the light for her master, if she had stayed out here," replied the ostler. And then the rattle of wheels became distinct, and in the next instant the feeble light of a couple of lamps became visible at the far end of the street, as the coach turned out of the Piazza Maggiore into the Via del Monte, and struggled forwards towards the knot at the inn door; it came at a miserable little trot, but with an accompaniment of tremendous whip-cracking, that awoke echoes in the silent streets far and near, and imparted an impression of breathless speed to the imagination of the bystanders, who, being Italians, accepted the symbol in despite of their certain knowledge that the reality of the thing symbolised was not there. Like the immortal Marchioness, Dick Swiveller's friend, in the *Old Curiosity Shop*, the Italians, when the realities of circumstances are unfavourable, can always manage to gild them a little by "making believe very strong."

"Now then, Signora Marta, bring out your light," called the deputy ostler in at the inn door.

The individual addressed as Signor Conte became evidently excited, and prepared himself to be the first

to present himself at the door of the coach as it drew up opposite the inn. The ostler stepped out into the street with his stable lanthorn. Signora Marta, shivering, with a huge shawl over her head, took up her position, lanthorn in hand, behind the Signor Conte, and the ramshackle old coach, rattling over the uneven round cobble-stones of the execrable pavement with a crash of noise that seemed to threaten that every jolt would be its last, came to a standstill at the inn door.

The Signor Conte Leandro Lombardoni—that was the name of the young man hitherto called Il Signor Conte—opened the door with his own hand, and, putting his head eagerly into the interior, cried,—

"Are you there, Signor Ercole? Well! What news? Have you succeeded? Let me give you a hand."

"Grazie, Signor Leandro, grazie," replied a high-pitched voice of singularly shrill quality from within the vehicle, "I don't know whether I can move. *Misericordia! che viaggio!* What a journey I have had. I am nearly dead. My blood is frozen in my veins. I have no use of my limbs. I shall never recover it; never!"

And then very slowly a huge bundle of cloaks and rags and furs, nearly circular in form and about five feet in diameter, began to move towards the door of the carriage, and gradually, by the help of Signor Leandro and Signora Marta, to struggle through it and get itself down on the pavement.

"And this I do and suffer for thee, Ravenna!" said the bundle in the same shrill tenor, making an attempt, as it spoke, to raise two little projecting fins towards the cold, unsympathising stars.

"But have you succeeded, Signor Ercole?" asked the other again, anxiously.

"I have succeeded in sacrificing myself for my country," replied the shrill voice with chattering teeth; "for I know I shall never get over it. I am frozen. It is a very painful form of martyrdom."

"But you can at least say one word, Signor Ercole? You can say yes or no to the question, whether you have succeeded in our object?" urged the Conte Leandro.

Signor Ercole Stadione, however, who was, as the reader is aware, no less important a personage than the *impresario* of the principal theatre of Ravenna, knew too well all the importance that belonged to the news he had to tell to part with his secret so easily.

"Signor Conte," he quavered out, "I tell you I am frozen! A man cannot speak on any subject in such a condition. I know nothing. My intellectual faculties have not their ordinary lucidity. I must endeavour to reach my home. Marta, hold the lamp here."

"And I who have waited here for your arrival ever since the *venti-quattro! Per Dio!* Do you think I ain't cold too? And the Marchese is expecting you. Of course, you will go to him at once?"

"I don't know that I shall ever recover myself sufficiently to do so. It is useless for the city to expect more from a man than he can accomplish. When I have got thawed, I will endeavour to do my duty. Good night, Signor Conte!" said the little *impresario*, preparing to follow his servant with the lanthorn, as well as the enormous quantity of wraps around him would allow him to do so.

"Come now, Signor Ercole, you won't be so ill-natured. You know how much interest I take in the matter. Think how long I have waited here for you, and nobody else has cared enough to do that. Come now, be good-natured, and tell a fellow. Just one word. Look here now," added the Conte Leandro, seeing that he was on the point of losing the gratifi-

cation for the sake of which he had undergone the penance of standing sentinel in the cold for the last hour, and that his only hope was to bring forward *les grands moyens*,—"see now, the only thing to bring you round is a glass of hot punch. Now, while you go home and get your things off, I will go to the café and get you a good glass of punch, hot and strong—smoking hot! and have it brought to your house, all hot, you know, in a covered jug. But before I go, you will just say the one word: Have you been successful? Come now. Just one word."

Signor Ercole Stadione, the *impresario*, would much have preferred not saying that one word just then. He knew perfectly well that the grand object of his questioner was to be the first to carry the great news to the Circolo—the club where all the young nobles of the town were in the habit of congregating; and to make the most of the sort of reputation to be gained by being the first in Ravenna to have accurate information on the matter in question. He knew also that within a quarter-of-an-hour after the news should be told to Signor Leandro Lombardoni it would be known to all Ravenna. Further, he was perfectly aware that, frozen or not

frozen, he must wait that evening on the Marchese, of whom Signor Leandro had spoken—the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare, in order to communicate to him the news which Signor Leandro was so anxious to hear; that not to do so would be as much as his standing and position in Ravenna were worth. And he would have preferred that the Marchese should not have heard what he had to tell before telling it to him himself; which he thought likely enough to happen, if he let the cat out of the bag to Signor Leandro. But the offer of the punch was irresistible. The poor little *impresario* knew how little possibility there was of finding any such pleasant stimulant in the cold, cheerless, wifeless little *quartière* which he and Marta called their home. His teeth were chattering with cold; and the hot punch carried the day.

"*Troppo buono, Signor Conte!* Truly a good glass of hot *ponche* would be the saving of me! It is very kindly thought of. Well, then; listen in your ear. But you won't say a word about it till to-morrow morning. It is all right. The thing is done. The writings signed. Have I done well, eh? Have I deserved well of the city, eh? But you won't say a word!"

"Bravo, Signor Ercole! Bravo, bravissimo! Not a word. Not a word. I run to order the punch. Good night. Not a word to a living soul!"

And the Conte Leandro ran off to give a hasty order at the café in the Piazza, on his way to the Circolo to spread his important news all over the town.

CHAPTER II.

THE MARCHESE LAMBERTO DI CASTELMARE.

Signor Leandro Lombardoni felt himself to be abundantly repaid for his hour of waiting in the cold street, and for the *bajocchi* expended on the glass of punch, by the position he occupied at the Circolo all that evening. He was the centre of every group anxious to gain the earliest information respecting a matter of the highest interest to all the society of Ravenna. And the matter belonged to a class of subjects respecting which the Conte Leandro was especially desirous of being thought to be thoroughly well-informed, and to have interest in the highest quarters.

The fact was, that Signor Ercole Stadione, the Ravenna *impresario*, had undertaken a journey to Milan, in the hope of accomplishing a negotiation in which the whole of the smaller provincial city had felt itself deeply interested. He had gone thither for the purpose of engaging the celebrated prima donna,

Bianca Lalli, to sing at Ravenna during the coming Carnival. The pretension was a very ambitious one on the part of the *impresario*—or, as it may be more properly said, on the part of the city—for the step was by no means the result of his own independent and unaided enterprise. Such matters were not done in that way in the good old times in the smaller cities of Italy. The matter had been much debated among the leading patrons of the musical drama in the little town. The chances of success had been canvassed. The financial question had been considered. Certain sacrifices had been determined on. And it had been settled what terms the *impresario* should be empowered to offer.

It had been fully felt and recognised that the hope of engaging the famous Bianca Lalli to sing at remote little Ravenna, during a carnival, was a singularly ambitious one. But there had been circumstances which had led those who had conceived the bold idea to hope that it would not prove to be so impossible as it might at first sight appear. There had been whispers of certain difficulties—untoward circumstances at Milan. Ill-natured things had been said of the "divina Lalli." Doubtless she had been more sinned against than sinning. But to put the

matter crudely—which, of course, no Italian who had to speak of it, was ever so ill-bred as to do—it would seem that the great singer had placed herself, or had been placed, in such relations with somebody or other bearing a great name in the Lombard capital, that the paternal Austrian government, at the instance of that somebody's family, had seen good to hint, in some gentle, but unmistakable manner, that it might, on the whole, be better that the divine Lalli should bless some other city with her presence during the ensuing season. And then came the consideration, that in all probability most of the great cities of the peninsula had, by that time, made their arrangements for the coming Carnival. Not impossible, too, that the "diva" herself might be not disinclined to allow a certain period of such comparative obscurity as an engagement at Ravenna would bring with it, to pass after her exit from Milan under such circumstances, before re-appearing on other boards where she would be equally in the eyes of all Europe. But this ground of hope, though it may have been felt, was never so much as alluded to in words, in Ravenna. In short, Ravenna had determined to make the bold attempt. And now Signor Ercole Stadione had returned from the arduous enterprise to

announce that it had been crowned with complete success.

None but those who have had some opportunity of becoming acquainted with the social habits and manners of the smaller cities of Italy—and that as they were some twenty years ago, and not as they are now—can imagine the degree in which a matter of the kind in question could be felt there to be a subject of general public interest. From the Cardinal Legate, who governed the province, down to the little boys who hung about the café doors, in the hope of picking up a half-eaten roll, there was not a human being in the city who did not feel that he had some part of the glory resulting from the fact that "La Lalli" was to sing at Ravenna during the Carnival. The *contadini*—the peasants outside the gates—even though they were only just outside it, cared nothing at all about the matter: another specialty of the social peculiarities of the peninsula.

The Cardinal Legate, restrained by the professional decorum of his cloth, said nothing save among his quite safe intimates; but, perhaps, like the sailor's parrot, he only thought the more.

As for the *jeunesse dorée* of the Circolo, to whom Signor Leandro recounted his great tidings with all

the self-importance to which the exclusive possession of news of such interest so well entitled him, it is impossible to do justice to the enthusiasm which the news excited among them.

All sorts of pleasing anticipations were indulged in. They were all jealous of each other by anticipation. Already, in the gravest spirit of business, a scheme for taking off her horses at the city gates and harnessing their noble selves to the carriage of the expected guest was discussed.

The reputation enjoyed by the great singer Bianca Lalli at that time was very high throughout Italy. But, perhaps,—any one of her rival goddesses would have said undoubtedly,—it was a reputation not wholly and exclusively due to her strictly vocal charms. She was, in truth, a woman of more than ordinary beauty; and was universally declared to exercise a charm on all who came within reach of her influence beyond that which even extraordinary beauty has always the privilege of exercising. All kinds of stories were told of her boundless power of fascination. In crude language, again,—such as her own countrymen never used concerning her,—the reputation of "la diva Lalli" was *tout soit peu*, a *reputation de scandale*. And it will be readily

imagined that the enthusiasm in her favour of the young frequenters of the Circolo at Ravenna was none the less vehement on this account.

It must, however, be added that she undoubtedly was a very admirable singer. Had this not been the case, the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare would not have interested himself so much as he had done in the plans and negotiations for bringing her to Ravenna. The Marchese was not a man to be much influenced by the prima donna's reputation for beauty and fascination. But he was "fanatico per la musica." He was the acknowledged leader in all matters musical in Ravenna; the most influential patron of the opera in the city; and all-powerful in the regulation of all theatrical affairs.

The Marchese Lamberto held a rather special position in the social world in Ravenna. His fortune was large; and the nobility of his family ancient. But it was not these circumstances only, or even mainly, that caused him to hold the place he did in the estimation of his fellow-citizens. He was a bachelor, now about fifty years old; and during some thirty of those years he had always been before the public in one manner or another, and always had in every capacity won golden opinions from all men.

Though abundantly rich enough to have gone occasionally to Rome, or even to have resided there entirely, if he had chosen to do so, he had, on the contrary, preferred to pass his whole life in his native city. And Ravenna was flattered by this, to begin with. Then his residence in the provincial city had been in many respects a really useful one, not only to that section of the body politic which is called, *par excellence*, society, but to the public in general. He had held various municipal offices, and had discharged the functions belonging to them with credit and applause. He was treasurer to a hospital, and a generous contributor to its funds. He was the founder of an artistic society for the education of young artists and the encouragement of their seniors. He was the principal director of a board of "publica beneficenza." He was the manager, and what we should call the trustee for the property of more than one nunnery. He was intimate with the Cardinal Legate, and a frequent and honoured guest at the palace. Of course in matters of orthodoxy and well-affected sentiments towards the Church and its government he was all that the agents of that government could desire. It has already been said that he was at the head of all matters musical and

theatrical in Ravenna. And besides all this, he gave every year three grand balls in Carnival; and his house was at all times open every Sunday and Wednesday evening to the *élite* of the society of the city.

Gradually it had come to be understood, rather by tacit agreement among the society which frequented these reunions than in obedience to any desire expressed by the Marchese on the subject, that on the Sunday evening ladies were expected; and on those days a sister-in-law of the Marchese, the widow of a younger brother, was always there to do the honours of the Palazzo Castelmare. The Wednesday evening parties had come to be meetings of gentlemen only. And on these occasions one marked element of the society consisted of all that the city possessed in the way of professors of natural science. For the Marchese was, in a mild way, fond of such pursuits, and had a special liking for anatomical inquiries and experiments.

In one respect only could the world fail to be wholly and perfectly contented with the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare. At the age of fifty he was still a bachelor! Not that the continuance of the noble line of Castelmare was thereby compromised. The sister-in-law already mentioned had a son, a

young man of two-and-twenty, at the time in question, who was the heir to the wealth and honours of the house, and who, it was to be hoped, would also inherit all that accumulated treasure of public esteem and respect which his uncle had been so uninterruptedly laying up. Neither could a social objection to the Marchese's bachelorhood be raised on the score of any such laxity of moral conduct as the world is wont to expect, and to tolerate with more or less of indulgence, in persons so free from special ties. Had the Marchese been an archbishop himself, instead of being merely the intimate friend of one, it could not have seemed in Ravenna more out of the question to mention his respected name in connection with any scandal or inuendo of the kind. There was not a mother in Ravenna who would not have been proud to see her daughter honoured by any such intercourse with the Marchese as might be natural between a father and his child. Proud indeed the most noble of those matrons would have been could she have supposed that any such intercourse tended towards sentiments of a more tender nature. But all hopes of this kind had been long given up in Ravenna. It was quite understood that the Marchese was not a marrying man.

Not that even now, in his fiftieth year, he might not well have entered the lists with many a younger man as a candidate for the favour of the sex. He was a man of a remarkably fine presence, tall, well made, and with a natural dignity and graceful bearing in all his movements, which were very impressive. He had never given in to the modern fashion of wearing either beard or moustache. And the contours of his face were too good and even noble to have gained anything by being so hidden. The large, strong, rather square jaw and chin, and smooth placid cheeks were strongly expressive of quiet decision and dignified force of will. The mouth, almost always the tell-tale feature of the face, seemed in his case rather calculated to puzzle any one who would have speculated on the meanings shadowed forth by the lines of it. It was certainly, with its large rows of unexceptionably brilliant teeth, a very handsome mouth. And it was often not devoid of much sweetness. Nobody had ever imagined that they detected any evil expression among its meanings. But whereas a physiognomist looking at that generally faithful expositor of the moral man, when it was at rest, would have been inclined to say, that it was a mouth indicative of much capacity for deep and strong

passion, a further study of it in its varied movements would have led him to the conclusion that no strong or violent passions had ever been there to leave their traces among its lines. The whole face was so essentially calm, unruffled, and placidly dignified.

The loftly noble forehead, the strongly marked brow, the well-opened calm grey eye, all told the same tale of a mind within well-balanced, thoroughly at peace with itself, and thoroughly contented with its outward manifestations, and with every particular of its position.

Clearly the Marchese di Castelmare was a remarkably handsome man. And yet there was something about him,—and always had been even as a young man,—which seemed to be in natural accordance with the fact that he had never seemed to seek female society, save as an amphytrion receiving all Ravenna within his hospitable doors. There was a kind of austerity about his bearing;—a something difficult to define, which would have prevented any girl from fancying that he was at all likely to want to make love to her; a something which made it as impossible that the refined courtesy of his address should have called a pleased blush to any girl's cheek, or made her pulse move one beat the faster, as that she should have

been so affected by the imposition of the hands of the bishop who confirmed her!

Such as the Marchese was, any committee in the world would have chosen him its president, any jury in the world would have named him its foreman, any board in the world have selected him as its chairman, any deputation in the world would have put him forward as its spokesman; any sovereign in the world might have appointed him grand master of the ceremonies; but never at any period of his life would the suffrages of the ball-room have pitched upon him to be the leader of the cotillon.

Perhaps it was that his life had been always too full to spare any space for such lighter matters. He had been left the head of his family when quite a young man, and had at once, in a great degree, stepped into the place he had ever since occupied in the social world of his native city. And what with his music, which was with him really a passion, and what with his dabblings in science, and what with the multifarious business he had always made for himself by real and useful attention to the affairs pertaining to all the functions he had filled, his life had really been a fully occupied one.

Any man, woman, or child in Ravenna would

have said, if such an unpleasant idea had crossed their minds, that what Ravenna would do without him it was frightful to think. He was very popular, as well as profoundly respected by all classes of his fellow-citizens. Though certainly a very proud man, his pride was of a nature that gave offence to nobody. He was not only proud of being Marchese di Castelmare; he was very proud of the esteem, the affection and respect of his fellow-citizens. And perhaps this was, next to his love of music, what most resembled a passion in his nature, and what most ministered to his enjoyment of life.

It was to this phœnix of a Marchese that Signor Ercole Stadione, the *impresario,* having comforted himself with the Conte Leandro's punch, and got somewhat thawed, and having changed his mountain of travelling wraps for a costume proper for persenting himself in such a presence, repaired to report the result of his journey to Milan.

CHAPTER III.

THE IMPRESARIO'S REPORT.

It has been said that Signor Ercole Stadione, when he was first introduced to the reader under circumstances somewhat unfavourable to that dignity of appearance and deportment on which he specially prided himself, presented the appearance of a round mass some five feet in diameter. And it may be thence concluded, that when reduced to the proportions familiar to the citizens of Ravenna, his utmost longitudinal dimensions did not exceed that measure. The *impresario* was in truth a very small man, weighing perhaps seven stone with his boots. But Signor Ercole held, and very frequently expressed, an opinion that dignity and nobility of appearance depended wholly on bearing, and in no wise on mere corporeal altitude. Men were measured in his country (Rome), he said, from the eyebrow upwards. And though Rome is not exactly the place, of all others, where one might expect to find such an estimate

of human value prevailing,—unless, indeed, smallness of that which a man has above his brow be deemed the desirable thing,—it was undeniable that little Signor Ercole carried a mass of forehead which might have been the share of a much taller man.

Nor were the pretensions put forward by the *impresario* on this score altogether vain. He was no fool;—a shrewd as well as a dapper little man, active and clever at his business, and well liked both by the artists and by the public, for which he catered, despite of being one of the vainest of mortals. Vanity makes some men very odious to their fellows;—in others it is perfectly inoffensive; and though damaging to a claim to respect, is perfectly compatible with a considerable amount of liking for the victim of it.

A very dapper little man was Signor Ercole, as he stepped forth, about eight o'clock, entirely refitted, to wait upon the Marchese at the Palazzo Castelmare. He was dressed in complete black, somewhat threadbare, but scrupulously brushed. He had a large frill at the bosom of his shirt, and more frills around the wristbands of it; one or two rings of immense size and weight on his small fingers; boots with heels two inches high, and a rather long frock-coat

buttoned closely round his little body. Signor Ercole had never been known to wear a swallow-tailed coat on any occasion. And spiteful people told each other, that his motive for never quitting the greater shelter of the frock was to be found in his fear of exhibiting to the unkindly glances of the world a pair of knock-knees of rare perfection.

When his toilet was completed, he threw over all a handsome black cloth cloak turned up with a broad border of velvet, which he draped around his person with the air of an Apollo, throwing the corner of the garment round the lower part of his face and over his shoulder, in a manner wholly unattainable by any man born on the northern side of the Alps; and kindly telling Marta that he would take the key, and that she had better not sit up for him in the cold, stepped forth on his errand.

"*Ben tornato,* Signor Ercole! I thank you for coming to me," said the Marchese, rising from his seat at his library-table, which was covered with papers and books, to receive the *impresario.*

Despite the extreme cold, this owner of a large fortune, and of one of the finest palaces in Ravenna, was not sitting in an easy-chair by the fire, as an Englishman might be expected to be found at such

an hour. The Italian's day is not divided into two portions as clearly as an Englishman's day is divided by his dinner hour into the time for business or out-door exercise, and the time for relaxation, for a book or other amusement. He is quite as likely to apply himself to any business or work of any kind after dinner as before. Still less has he the Englishman's notion of making himself comfortable in his home.

There was a miserable morsel of wood fire in the room in which the Marchese sat; but it was at the far end of it. And in many a well-to-do Italian home there would have been none at all. In order not to be absolutely frozen, he sat in a large cloak, and had beside him, or in his hands, a little earthenware pot filled with burning braize—a *scaldino*, as it is called,—the use of which is common to the noble in his palace, and the beggar in the street.

He pointed to a chair near the table, and as he spoke, paid his visitor the ordinary courtesy of offering him his *scaldino*.

"My duty, my mere duty, Eccellenza," said Signor Ercole, letting his cloak fall gracefully from his shoulders, and declining the proffered pot of braize with an action that might have suited an

Emperor. "Of course my first care and object on arriving was to wait on your Excellency. I arrived with barely a breath of life remaining in my body. What a journey! What a journey! But if I had been frozen quite I could not have forgotten that my first duty was to report what I have accomplished to your Excellency."

"Thanks, good Signor Ercole, thanks; you know the interest I take in all that concerns the honour of our theatre, and the pleasures of our citizens; and I may truly add, in all that touches your interest, my good Signor Ercole."

"*Troppo buono! Èccellenza! Troppo buono davvero!*" said the little man, half rising from his chair, to execute a bow in return for the Marchese's speech, while his cloak fell around his legs.

"I suppose that in such weather as this the diligence was behind its time—*È naturale*—but I have already heard, in a general way, that you have been successful. I congratulate you on it, Signor Ercole, with all my heart!"

"I trusted that I should have been the first to tell your Excellency the news. I am conscious that it was due to you, Signor Marchese, to be the first to hear the result of my negotiation. But *che vuole?*

There was the Conte Leandro waiting for the coach, and standing at the door as I got out of it, more dead than alive! And there was no way of getting rid of him. I was forced to tell him, in a word, that our hopes were crowned with success. He faithfully promised to keep the fact secret. But, doubtless, all the town knows it by this time! *Che vuole?*"

"*È naturale! è naturale!*" returned the Marchese, with a graceful wave of his hand; "naturally they are all anxious to know the result of our *impresario's* labours. And I was not left in ignorance. My nephew ran in from the Circolo to tell me; he had just heard it from Signor Leandro. But I thought that I should have a visit from yourself, Signor Ercole, before long."

"*E come, e come,* Signor Marchese; could your Excellency imagine that I could so fail in my duty as to have omitted waiting on your lordship! Had it not been that I was half killed by this awful weather, I should have placed myself at your Excellency's orders an hour ago. Oh, Signor Marchese, such a journey from Bologna hither! I know what is my duty to the city; I know what is expected of me. But—Eccellenza, there are benefactors to their country, who have statues raised to them, that have

suffered less in the gaining of them, than I have this day."

"Povero, Signor Ercole! But who knows? Perhaps we may see the day when Ravenna will reward your exertions with a monument. Why not? It must be a statue, life size, nothing less, with 'Ercole Stadione, *La Patria riconoscente*,' on the base," said the Marchese, with an irony, the fine flavour of which did not in the least pierce, as it was not intended to pierce, the plate armour of the little *impresario's* vanity.

"Oh, Eccellenza!" said the poor little man, with the most perfect good faith in the propriety, as well as the seriousness, of his patron's proposition.

"And now, then," said the Marchese, "let us hear all about it. She accepts our terms?"

"The *scrittura* has been signed before a notary, Excellenza."

"Bravo! she sings—?"

"The whole *repertorio*, Signor Marchese! What is there she could not sing?"

"And three representations a week?"

"Three representations a week. My instructions were formal on that point, as your Excellency knows."

"Good! quite right! And now what is she, this *diva?* What is she like? We know that Signor Ercole Stadione is as good a judge of the merits of the lady as of the singer?" said the Marchese, with a smile. "I don't ask you about her singing," he added. "We have all heard all that can be said about that."

"Well, Signor Marchese, if I am to speak my own poor opinion, I take the Signora Lalli to be decidedly the most beautiful woman it was ever my good fortune to see," said Signor Ercole, with a voice and manner of profound conviction.

"Paris himself, if called on to be umpire once again, could require no more conclusive testimony, my good Signor Ercole. But that is not exactly what I mean. Her mere beauty is a matter that does not interest me very keenly. What I want to know is what sort of a scenic presence has she? Can she take the stage? I do not ask if she is captivating in a drawing-room; but has she the face and figure needed to be effective in the theatre? I need not tell you, my friend, that these are two different things, and do not always go together." said the Marchese, whose interest in the matter was, as he said, wholly theatrical; first, that he and

the society of Ravenna should enjoy some fine singing during the coming Carnival; and, secondly, that the Lalli should produce such an enthusiasm as should lead all the theatrical world to think and say, that a great stroke had been achieved, and a very public-spirited thing done in bringing about the engagement. He was anxious that the step, which he had had a large share in taking, should result in a great and universally admitted success.

"Eccellenza! I have no doubt that your lordship will be satisfied in these respects. Most true it is, as your Excellency so judiciously remarks, that we require something more than merely a beautiful face, or even than a fine figure. And I have never had the good fortune to see 'La Lalli' on the boards. But as far as my poor judgment goes, she is admirably gifted with all the requisites for achieving the result we desire. Then there is the testimony of all Milan! And I succeeded in speaking with an old friend who had seen her the year before last at Naples, and whose report I can trust. The opinion seems to be universal that few artists have ever possessed the gift of fascinating an audience to the degree that she does. Your Excellency may take my word for it, she is a very clever woman. My own interviews with her

sufficed to convince me of that fact. And I need not tell your Excellency, that little as some of the empty-headed young gentlemen in the stalls may suspect it, talent,—not only the special talent of song but general talent,—has much to do with the power of fascination that a gifted actress exercises."

"Most true, *mio bravo* Signor Ercole; you speak like an oracle; and if she left on you the impression that she is a clever woman, I have no doubt in the world that she is so."

There was no irony in the Marchese's mind when he said this; and the little *impresario*, highly gratified again, half rose from his chair to bow in return for the compliment.

"As for the specialties of her face and person," continued the *impresario*, "they appeared to me highly favourable. Very tall,—perhaps your lordship or I might say too tall. But—on the stage—the prejudice is in favour of a degree of tallness that we might not admire off it. Gestures, bearing, and the movement of the person equally capable of expressing majestic dignity, or heart-subduing pathos. A most graceful walk. In short, a *persona tutta simpatica*. As for the head—magnificent hair,—blonde, which for choice I would always prefer—the true Titian

sun-tinged auburn,—a telling eye, finely formed nose, and mouth of inexpressible sweetness!"

"Per Bacco, Signor Ercole, a Phœnix indeed! A *Diva davvero!*" said the Marchese.

"Eccellenza, she'll do," said the little man nodding his head with its top-heavy forehead three or four times emphatically. "If she do not make such a sensation in Ravenna as we have not known here for a long time, say that Ercole Stadione knows nothing of his profession."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the Marchese, gleefully rubbing his hands. "And now, my good friend, I won't keep you from the bed and the rest you so well deserve any longer. You may depend on it that your zeal in this matter wont be overlooked or forgotten."

"*Troppo buono,* Eccellenza! But there was one word I wished to say to your lordship," continued little Signor Ercole, dropping his voice to a lower key, and speaking with some hesitation,—one little word that I thought it might be useful, or—or—desirable to mention——"

"Yes, speak on, my dear Signor Ercole, I am all attention. What is it? No drawback I hope!"

"Only this, Signor Marchese," said the little man

casting a glance round the room, dropping his voice still more, and bringing his head nearer to the ear of the Marchese; "only this :—you see if there had been nothing—disagreeable,—nothing untoward, as I may say—your lordship understands, we should never have had La Lalli at Ravenna. There has been a—sort of difficulty—your lordship understands—spiteful things have been said—calumny—all calumny no doubt—the constant attendant of merit, alas! we all know. But—in short—here in Ravenna—it would not be—desirable,—your Excellency understands and appreciates what I would say a thousand times better than I can say it. It would be in every point of view better, as your Excellency sees, that no idle chatter of this kind should be set about here. It would be inexpedient for more reasons than one."

"Quite so; quite so. Your ideas on the subject are happily judicious, Signor Ercole. What have we to do with misunderstandings that may have arisen at Milan? Of course, it is not our business to have ever heard anything of the kind. And I'll tell you what I'll do, and that at once, before there is time for any mischief to be done. I will just give my nephew a hint. He can be trusted. He is discreet. And it will be easy for him to put down at once and

discountenance any talk of the kind, or any rumour that might find its way among our youngsters."

"The very thing, Eccellenza! The Marchese Ludovico will understand the thing at once. And half a word from him would give the key-note, as I may say, to the tone of talk about the lady. Ravenna must not be thought to be contenting herself with that which Milan rejects," said Signor Ercole, with the air of a patriot.

"I should think not, indeed! And, doubtless, Milan would have been but too glad to retain La Lalli, had it not been for some unimportant *contretemps*. Ludovico shall put the matter in its right light."

As he spoke, the Marchese rang a little hand-bell which stood on his library table; and on a servant entering from the anteroom, he told him just to step across to the Circolo, and request the Marchese Ludovico to be so good as to come to him for five minutes.

In very little more than that time the man returned, saying that the Marchese Ludovico was not at the Circolo. He had been there for a few minutes at the beginning of the evening, but had gone away without saying whither he was going.

The Marchese knitted his brows when this message was given to him; and after a minute's thoughtful silence, shook his head in a manner that showed him to be not a little displeased. From a look of intelligence that might have been observed in Signor Ercole's eyes, it might have been judged that he understood that the Marchese was more annoyed than on account of the momentary frustration of his immediate purpose, and that he was aware of the nature of his annoyance. But he did not venture to say any word on the subject; and the Marchese took leave of him, merely saying that he would not forget to act on Signor Ercole's caution when he should see his nephew the next morning.

CHAPTER IV.

PAOLINA FOSCARELLI.

The young Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare had in the early part of the evening lounged into the Circolo, as was the habit of most of those of his class, seniors as well as juniors; but he had, as had been correctly reported to his uncle, very shortly left it without saying a word to any one as to how he intended to dispose of his evening. The Marchese Ludovico flattered himself, as people are apt to flatter themselves in similar cases, that his absence would be little noted, and that his reticence would suffice to leave all Ravenna in ignorance as to the errand on which he was bound when he left the Circolo. So far was this from being the case, however, that there was not one, at all events among the younger men, whom he left behind him, who did not know perfectly well where he was gone; and that his uncle, when by the unforeseen accident that has been related he was

made aware of his absence from the club, was at no loss to guess what he had done with himself.

But in order that the reader may have a like advantage, it will be necessary to mention very briefly some circumstances which occurred previously to the period referred to in the former chapters.

Some months before the time of Signor Ercole Stadione's journey to Milan, a wandering Englishman had arrived at Ravenna, and having spent three or four days in examining with much interest the wonderful wealth of Mosaics of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, still preserved in the churches of the ancient capital of the Exarchs, had continued his route to Venice.

There, in the gallery of the Academia, his attention had been attracted by a female student, who was engaged in copying a canvas of Tintoretto. As it so happened that the traveller was a competent judge of such matters, he was struck by the goodness of the work, especially when considered in connection with the appearance of the artist. She was evidently very young,—a slim, slender girl, whose girlish figure looked all the more willow-like from the simple plainness, and what seemed to the Englishman the insufficiency, of her clothing. For the weather,

though not so severe as when it had half frozen Signor Ercole Stadione, was already very cold,—cold enough to have depopulated the gallery of its usual crowd of copying artists. At some distance from the young girl's easel, sitting in a corner lighted up by a stray ray of sunshine, there was an old woman busily knitting,—probably the girl's mother, or protrectress. And besides those two, and the Englishman, and a lounging attendant wrapped in his cloak, there was no other soul in the gallery.

Yet the young student busily plied her task; nor was she surprised into looking up by the stopping of the stranger behind her chair. He did not see her face, therefore; and it would be consequently unfair to imagine that any portion of the interest he could not help feeling in her was to be attributed to the ordinary charm of a pretty face, whereas it was really due partly to the artistic merit of her copy, partly to her bravery in sticking to her work despite the severity of the season, and partly to her youth and very apparent poverty.

Suddenly, as he watched the progress of her work slowly growing beneath the rapid movements of her slender, blue-cold fingers, the idea came into his mind that here might be a favourable opportunity of

obtaining what he had much wished to procure when he had been at Ravenna,—some drawings of several of the most remarkable of the Mosaics in the churches of San Vitale and St. Apollinare in Classe. He was quite satisfied from what he saw that the young artist was competent to execute the drawings he required. The conscientious determination; which alone could have made her continue her work under such circumstances, was a guarantee to him that she would do her best. It was not probable that the expectations of the girl before him as to remuneration would go beyond such sum as he was willing to pay. And lastly—though truly not least in that Englishman's mind—it might be that such a proposal would be a very acceptable boon to a poor and meritorious artist. So managing to speak to the attendant, when he was at a far part of the gallery, he learned from him that the girl's name was Paolina Foscarelli; that the old woman was, the officer believed, her aunt; that her name was Orsola Steno; and that they lived together at No. 8 in the Campo San Donato.

That same evening the stranger desired his *servitore di piazza* to make inquiries about Signora Orsola Steno, and her niece, who copied in the gallery; and the next morning he was told that, if

he would call upon the Director of the Gallery, that gentleman would be happy to reply to any inquiries about the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli.

The Englishman waited on the Director forthwith, and from him learned that such a commission as he had thought of giving to the young copyist could not be better bestowed in any point of view. The Director spoke highly of her artistic capabilities, and more highly still of her character and worth. She had been left an orphan, wholly unprovided for, several years ago. Her father had gained his living by copying in the gallery. The old woman, Orsola Steno, with whom she lived, was no relation to her, but had been the dear friend of her mother, and had taken the orphan to live with her out of pure charity. They were very poor,—very poor, indeed. But Paolina was beginning to do something. She had already sold one or two copies of small pictures. The larger work, on which she was engaged, she had undertaken by the advice of the Director, in the hope of disposing of it when the following summer should bring with it the usual incoming tide of travellers.

The result was that the stranger, taking with him a little note from the Director, went again to the

gallery the next day, and finding Signorina Paolina at her post as usual, then and there made his proposition to her.

He was glad, when in doing so he spoke face to face with the girl, that the matter had been settled in his mind before he had seen her. For he was pleased to be sure that his judgment had not been warped in the matter by the irresistible prejudice in favour of a beautiful girl. And had he seen Paolina first, he could have had no such assurance. In truth, the poor Venetian painter's orphan child was very beautiful.

It is little to the purpose to attempt a detailed description of her beauty; for such descriptions rarely, if ever, succeed in conveying to the imagination of a reader any accurate presentation of the picture, which the writer has in his mind's eye. She was dark. Hair, brows, eyes, and complexion, were all dark; and the contour of the face was of the long or oval type of conformation—very delicate—transparently delicate — more so, the Englishman thought, not without a pull at his heart-strings, than was quite compatible with a due daily supply of nourishment. Still she did not look unhealthy. At seventeen a good deal of pinching may be

undergone without destroying the elastic vigour of youth.

But the chief and most striking charm of the beautiful face was unquestionably imparted to it from the moral and intellectual nature within. There was a calm and quiet dignity in the expression of the pure and noble brow, which may often have been seen in women of similar character, and of some twenty-five years of age. But it is rare to find such at seventeen. Doubtless the having been left alone in the world at so tender an age, had done much towards producing the expression in question. It was added to, moreover, by the singular grace of the girl's figure and mode of standing there before the stranger, as she had risen from her easel on his presenting her with the Director's note.

She was rather above the middle height, and very slender;—more so, the Englishman thought again, than she ought to have been. She was very poorly and even insufficiently clad. But the little bit of quite plain linen around her slim throat was spotlessly clean; and her poor and totally unornamented chocolate-coloured stuff dress was in decently tidy condition, and was worn with that nameless and inexplicable grace which causes it to be said of

similarly gifted women that they may wear anything.

And the stranger was delighted, too, with her manner in accepting his proposition. Though she made no attempt to conceal, and, indeed, eagerly expressed her sense of the value to her of the proposal that was made to her, there was a modest, and at the same time self-respecting, dignity about her acceptance of it, which was to his mind an earnest of the highly conscientious manner in which the task would be carried out.

It was therefore settled at once that Paolina, together with her friend and protectress, the Signora Orsola Steno, should proceed to Ravenna as soon as she could conveniently do so. A list of the works of which she was required to make copies was given to her. It included, besides the whole of the very interesting Mosaics in San Vitale, and several of the curious Mosaic portraits of the early bishops of the city in the church of St. Apollinare in Classe, two remarkable full-length figures from the ancient baptistery, the representation of the Saviour as the "Good Shepherd" in the celebrated mausoleum of the Empress Galla Placidia, and the portraits of the Apostles in the private chapel of the Cardinal. Of

all these works, exact copies were to be executed on a scale of one-sixth the size of the originals; and it was calculated that the work would require at least fifteen months to do it in. A sufficient sum of money was paid in advance to enable Signora Orsola Steno and her ward to move to Ravenna, and to begin their residence there; and satisfactory arrangements were made for subsequent quarterly payments of two-thirds of the price to be paid for the completed copies.

Besides all this, the English patron provided the young artist with a letter of introduction, which he doubted not would make smooth all difficulties which might lie in the way of her obtaining the permissions and facilities necessary for the execution of her task. This letter was addressed to the "Illustrissimo Signor il Signor Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare." The English traveller had brought from Rome a letter of introduction to the Marchese, and had received from him, during his short stay at Ravenna, all that courteous attention and friendly interest in his artistic researches which Englishmen are always sure to meet with in the smaller cities of Italy, even in yet larger measure than in the larger capitals, where strangers of all sorts are more abundant.

Thus equipped and provided, Paolina Foscarelli, accompanied by Signora Orsola Steno, had arrived in Ravenna in the March of the same year, in the November of which Signor Ercole Stadione had made his journey to Milan.

CHAPTER V.

RIVALRY.

The first care of the two Venetian women, on arriving in their new place of abode, which seemed to them almost as much a foreign country as Pekin might seem to an Englishman, was, of course, to present their letter of introduction to the powerful and illustrious protector to whom they were recommended. But there had, thereupon, arisen a difference of opinion between the older and the younger lady. Old Orsola Steno, acting on the wisdom which certain observations of life picked up in her sixty years of passage through it had probably taught her, was strongly of opinion that the important letter should be presented to the Marchese by Paolina in person, —or if not that, by both of them together. But Paolina strongly objected to this mode of proceeding; and urged her friend to take upon herself the duty of waiting on the Marchese. Orsola contested the

point as strongly as she could. But as it was very rarely that Paolina had ever opposed her in any thing, she was the less prepared to resist opposition on the present occasion. And as Paolina was in this matter obstinate, old Orsola yielded; and set forth by herself to walk to the Palazzo Castelmare. Nobody had ever any difficulty in obtaining access to the popular Marchese; and the Signora Orsola Steno was at once ushered into his library,—presented her letter, and was received with all courtesy and kindness.

To receive recommendations of all sorts, to be asked to render all kinds of services, was nothing new or uncommon to the Marchese. He ran over the Englishman's letter rapidly.

"*Va bene! va bene!* At your service, Signora! I shall be most happy to give you all the assistance in my power. I remember very well that Signor Vilobè (Willoughby was the Englishman's name) was desirous of procuring copies of some of our mosaics. I am very happy he has found so competent a person to execute them."

Signora Orsola made a feeble attempt to point out that she was not herself the artist who was to make the copies in question; but what with her

awe of the grand seigneur to whom she was speaking, and what with the strangeness of her Venetian tones to her hearer's ear, and what with the Marchese's hurry, her explanation failed to reach his comprehension.

"Yes! You and your companion will need to find a suitable lodging, the first thing. We must see to it for you. But the fact is, Signora Foscarelli, that I am more than usually busy this morning. I am expecting some gentlemen here on business every minute. If you will excuse me, therefore, I will entrust the commission of finding a proper *quartiere* for you to my nephew. He will be more likely than I am to know where what you require is likely to be found. He shall call upon you this morning. Where are you? At the *locanda de' Tre Rè!* Very good. Of course you don't want to remain in an inn longer than can be helped. I will tell my nephew to go to you this morning."

So Signora Steno returned to the "Tre Rè," a little alarmed at the thought that she had passed herself off for another person and a somewhat different one, but charmed with the courtesy and kindness of the Marchese. And in less than an hour the strangers from Venice heard two voices

below in the entrance of the *locanda* inquiring for two Venetian ladies who had recently arrived in Ravenna.

Two voices!—for it had so happened that when the servant, whom the Marchese Lamberto had sent to his nephew to request him to undertake this little commission for him, found the Marchese Ludovico at the door of the Circolo, the Signore Conte Leandro Lombardoni was lounging there with him.

"Bah! what a bore? My uncle is always making himself the *maestro di casa,* the manager, the protector, the servant of all the world. Tell the Marchese I'll go directly," he said to the servant; then added to his companion, "Come, Leandro, don't desert me! Let's go together and see what these Venetian women want."

"I ought to go to the Contessa Giulia at two. She'll be waiting for me, and will be furious if I disappoint her. Never mind, what must be, must be! *I Tre Rè!* Ugh, what a distance; why, it is at the other end of the town?"

"Never mind, come along; it will do you good to walk half a mile for once and away," returned Ludovico, who knew perfectly well how much to believe about the Contessa Giulia's despair at his friend's non-appearance.

Thus the two young men went together to the *locanda de' Tre Rè* to execute the commission entrusted to his nephew by the Marchese Lamberto.

"Yes," said a slatternly girl, who came forth from some back region at the call of the two young men, and who stared at them with an offensive mixture of surprise and understanding interest, when they inquired for the ladies recently arrived from Venice. "Yes, they were upstairs, on the right hand, in No. 13." So they climbed the stairs, knocked at No. 13, were told to *passare* by the voice of Signora Orsola, and in the next instant were in the room with the two strangers.

The first glance at the occupants of the chamber produced a shock of surprise, which manifested itself in so sudden a change of manner and bearing in the two young men, that it would have been ludicrous to any looker-on. The two hats came down from the two heads with a spring-like suddenness and quickness; and both the young men bowed lowly.

"Ladies," said Ludovico, addressing himself mainly to the elder, but turning also towards the younger as he spoke, while the Conte Leandro stared unmitigatedly at Paolina; "we come to you, sent by my uncle the Marchese di Castelmare, and charged

by him to assist you in finding a convenient *quartiere* for your residence in Ravenna. Permit me to say on my own behalf," he added, turning more entirely towards Paolina, "that I hope it may not be a short one!"

"If the Signorina would make her stay among us as long as we would wish it, she would never leave Ravenna any more," said the Conte Leandro, with a glance from his sharp little eyes, and a bow of his fat person, that were meant to be quite killing.

"It is this young lady, I conclude, who has undertaken to copy some of our mosaics for the Englishman, who writes to my uncle, then?" said Ludovico with a good-humoured and bright smile.

"That is it, Signor—though she is but such a slip of a thing to look at. I was afraid the Signor Marchese had taken it into his head that I was Paolina Foscarelli. Lord love you! I could not make, nor yet copy a picture, if it were to save my life!"

"My uncle will be equally happy to have it in his power to oblige either lady," rejoined Ludovico.

"I am sure the Marchese is too good," said Signora Steno; "we remain here till the Signorina Foscarelli has finished the job she has undertaken,

and no longer, nor no shorter. And some place we must find to live in the while. And if your lordship could tell us where we would be likely to find a couple of bedrooms, a bit of a sitting-room, and the use of a kitchen, it would be very kind."

"There will be no difficulty about that, I think, Signora," said the Marchese Ludovico; "I will go at once and inquire! I think I know where what we want may be had. If you will permit me, I will return to you here in less than half an hour."

"*Troppo garbato*, Signor Marchese!" said Orsola.

"If the Signorina will permit me," said Leandro, "I think I know of just such a little *quartierino* as would suit her, snug, quiet, and *perfettamente libero*."

To this offer, Paolina felt herself constrained to reply by a silent little bow. His former speech had received no reply whatsoever.

"I think I had better do what my uncle has told me to do, Leandro," said the Marchese Ludovico, drily.

And Paolina felt sufficiently grateful to him for the amount of snubbing contained in his accent to say the first words she had spoken since they entered the room. "We shall be exceedingly obliged to you,

Signiore, if you will do so. Any *quartiere* which the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare could recommend to us," she added, with a significant emphasis on the words, "would be sure to suit us."

"But perhaps the Marchese Lamberto may not know half as much about such matters as I do, *bella Signorina*. People forget so many things by the time they come to the age of the Marchese," said the Conte Leandro, with a leering smile, which was meant to establish a confidential understanding between him and Paolina. But the young girl's only answer was to turn in her chair a little more away from him towards the window.

"I think we had better leave the ladies, and see if we can find for them what they require. I should prefer doing myself what my uncle has entrusted to me," said Ludovico, with a frown on his brow.

"Very good—do so. You say you shall be back here in half an hour; if these ladies will permit me I will remain with them till you come back, and then we can all go and look at the *quartiere* you have found together," said the Conte Leandro.

Poor Paolina, though perfectly determined not to acquiesce in this arrangement, was quite at a loss what to say or do to prevent it from being carried out.

"But you forget your engagement to the Contessa Giulia," said Ludovico; "surely you had better make haste to keep it."

He had no belief whatever in any such engagement, and had a very faint hope that any care for consistency would avail to induce his friend the Conte Leandro to affect the necessity of keeping it. But he also was perfectly determined not to leave him in the room with the strangers, though almost as much at a loss as Paolina how to prevent it.

"Oh, hang the Contessa Giulia! In any case, it is too late to go to her now, and I am sure I shall like much better to stay here," said Leandro.

"Very likely. But you forget that it may not be equally agreeable to these ladies that you should remain here, and they just arrived from a journey too," said the Marchese Ludovico, who was inwardly cursing his folly in having brought his friend with him on this errand, which he unquestionably would not have done had he had the remotest idea what manner of ladies they were that his uncle had deputed him to attend on.

"By-the-by, Leandro," he said, suddenly, as he was moving towards the door, "you must come with me after all; for now I remember that the rooms I

had in my mind were let a short time since, and the best thing we can do will be to go and look at those you spoke of."

"Oh! I will tell you where they are——" said Leandro.

"No, no! that won't do at all; come—come along. I won't go there without you. Come!" said the Marchese.

And this was said in a manner that had the effect of making Leandro take leave of the ladies, with many hopes that they might meet again ere long.

Very soon after the two young men were in the street together, Ludovico protested that he must call at the Circolo before attending to the business they were on; and when he got there he pretended to be obliged to run home for a minute to the Palazzo Castelmare, which was hard by, saying that he would return and rejoin the Conte Leandro in less than five minutes. And very heartily did that deceived gentleman abuse his friend, when he had waited an hour, and found that he did not return at all. Then, poor gentleman! he knew that he had been bamboozled,—cruelly treated, as he said himself. And he perfectly well understood his dear friend's object, too!

"Such an intolerable, abominable coxcomb as that Ludovico is! As if he fancied that nobody was to have a chance of speaking to that pretty girl but himself. As if he thought that he had the ghost of a chance with a woman, if I thought it worth while to cut him out!" grumbled the gallant, gay Leandro to himself.

The Marchese Ludovico, meanwhile, the instant he had succeeded in freeing himself from his companion, darted off in search of an apartment, which he thought would just suit his fair clients; hurried back to them, at the inn; and had them installed in their new quarters by that evening.

"I am sure I do not know how to thank you enough for all your kindness, Signor Marchese. I do not know what we should have done without it," said the Signora Orsola.

"For *all* your kindness!" repeated Paolina, with a look and an emphasis which, while it expressed her gratitude, left him at no loss to understand what part of all he had done for them had chiefly seemed to the pretty Paolina to merit her special thanks.

And these were the facts and the circumstances that had brought about a state of matters which left the

Marchese Lamberto and the gossips of the Circolo in no doubt where the young Marchese Ludovico had gone to pass his evening, when his uncle sent for him to the club for the purpose which the reader wots of, and failed to find him there.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

Nearly eight months had elapsed between that day when the Signora Orsola and the Signorina Paolina were installed in their new lodging and the day when the Marchese Ludovico was sitting in the more than modest little room over a miserable morsel of fire, with the two Venetians, when his uncle sent for him to give him the hint about any inconvenient gossip that might be whispered concerning the Signora Bianca Lalli, in accordance with the suggestion of the *impresario*.

The Marchese Lamberto had made the personal acquaintance of the young artist, who had been recommended to his protection very shortly after the day on which he had deputed his nephew to find a lodging for her; and he had instantly become aware that he had made a mistake in so doing;—that he would certainly have deemed it better to take that

care upon himself rather than have confided it to the young Marchese, if he had had the least idea what sort of a person the Venetian artist was. Nevertheless, he had been very strongly impressed with the propriety of Paolina's manner and bearing, and after one or two more interviews, with the thorough modesty of her mind, and purity and dignity of her character. And the Marchese was a man well competent to form a sound judgment of such matters.

He had no reason to think that the young man, his nephew, was as prudent, as steady, as little liable to the influence of female beauty, as cold, if you will, as he himself had been at the same age. On the contrary, the character, which the Marchese Ludovico had made for himself in Ravenna, was a rather diametrically opposite one. But he was strongly of opinion that in any enterprise of an illegitimate nature which his nephew might attempt with the young artist, he would have his trouble only for his pains. And, of course, any enterprise of any other nature was wholly out of the question.

Still, as the months went on he would have been far better contented that his nephew should have been less often at the home of the two Venetians. There were circumstances which made such visits

especially inexpedient at the present time. He knew that the young man was there much oftener than he judged to be in any way desirable; and the young man *was* there much oftener than his uncle knew. The Marchese Lamberto was still very much persuaded that Paolina had not been led by his nephew into any false step of a seriously blamable nature. But this was by no means any reason with the Marchese for approving of his nephew's conduct. The intercourse was altogether objectionable. Talk was engendered,—talk of an undesirable description; and this was excessively disagreeable to the Marchese, who had views for his nephew which might be seriously compromised by it. A *liaison* of the kind, let the real nature of it be what it would, was in any case discreditable to his nephew and heir, and damaging more or less to the position which he wished to see the young man occupy in the town. It was especially so, as has been said, at the present conjuncture.

Then, of course, it could not be otherwise than injurious to the girl. She had, in some sort, been recommended to his care. And it disturbed him much, that the conduct of his nephew should be the means of damaging her reputation.

Yet the Marchese, being a man of sense, knew very well that it would not have done any good to attempt to exercise any such authority over the young man as to forbid him to visit the lodging of the Venetians. In the first place, such a step would, according to the notions and ways of looking at things of the society in which he lived, have placed him himself in a very ridiculous light;—a danger which was not to be contemplated for an instant! And, besides, the Marchese was very well aware that even if such an attempt did not cause his nephew to assume a position of open rebellion, it would only have the effect of making him do secretly and still more objectionably what he did, as it was, comparatively openly.

Comparatively, it must be said; for Ludovico was very much more frequently at the little house in the Strada di S. Eufemia than his uncle wotted of.

Not much more frequently, however, than was very well known by most of his contemporaries and fellow-habitués of the Circolo,—by pretty well the whole of the "society" of Ravenna, that is to say. And in the earlier part of the time in question,—of the eight months, that is, from the March in which the young artist came to Ravenna, to the November

in which Signor Ercole Stadione had made his journey to Milan—there had been plenty of joking and raillery about Ludovico's enthralment by the "bella Veneziana," and many attempts to compete with him for so very attractive and desirable a "buona fortuna." But all this had only been at the beginning of the time. Ludovico had taken the matter in a tone and in a humour, that had soon put an end to all such joking and to all such attempts. It was in all ways easy for him to do this. He was popular, and much liked among the young men, in the first place. His social position, as the heir of one of the first families of the province whether for wealth or nobility of race, and of a man of such social standing as his uncle, made it a very undesirable thing to quarrel with him. And even without any of such vantage-ground of position, Ludovico di Castelmare was a man, whose path it would have been dangerous to cross in such a matter as this, and who was very well capable of affording to any woman, in whom he was interested, a very efficient protection against any such offence as the most enterprising of the *jeunesse dorée* of Ravenna might have been disposed to offer her.

The Conte Leandro Lombardoni had made the

utmost of the chance that had rendered him the earliest acquaintance of the beautiful Venetian in Ravenna, with the exception of Ludovico himself. He had chattered, and boasted after the manner of his kind. He had succeeded in finding out the lodging, which Ludovico had taken so much pains to conceal from him, and had endeavoured to establish himself on the footing of a visiting acquaintance in the Strada Sta. Eufemia. But it had come to pass, that a degree of intimacy had very quickly grown up between Paolina and Ludovico, which permitted her to let him understand that he would render her an acceptable service by once again ridding her of the Conte Leandro, as he had done on that first day of their acquaintance. And the result was that, one evening, the gallant Conte, on knocking at the door of the house in the Strada di S. Eufemia, had it opened to him by his friend Ludovico,—and further, that he never came back there any more, or was heard again to make any allusion whatever to his Venetian acquaintances.

But what was no longer said jestingly before Ludovico's face was none the less said enviously, sneeringly, or knowingly behind his back. It was perfectly well understood by all the young men in

Ravenna that he was desperately in love with the beautiful Venetian artist. As to the terms on which he stood with her there were differences of opinion. But by far the more accredited notion was that the affair was quite a normal and ordinary one; and that the charming Paolina was the young Marchese's mistress.

Would he give her up, when the marriage, which, as was well known to all Ravenna, his uncle had been arranging for him with the young Contessa Violante di Marliani, and which was expected to come off shortly, should be consummated? That was the more interesting point for speculation. Would he, as really seemed not impossible, be mad enough to carry on with this Venetian girl to such an extent as to give umbrage to the family of the Contessa, and perhaps even endanger the match? This also was debated among his young peers of the Circolo, while he was passing the hours in the Strada di Sta. Eufemia.

His uncle was far from being aware how far matters had gone with his nephew in this matter. But he knew enough to make him uneasy about it, and to lead him to endeavour to push on the match with the Contessa Violante by every means in his

power: for the marriage with the Lady Violante was, in every point of view, a desirable one. The Cardinal Legate of Ravenna was a Marliani, and the young lady in question was his great-niece—the granddaughter of his only brother. She had lost both her parents at an early age, and now lived at Ravenna with a great-aunt,—the younger sister of the Cardinal, under his protection and wing, as it were. The family was not a rich one, but the Cardinal had worn the purple many years. He had held very lucrative offices in the Apostolic Court previously, and had doubtless amassed very considerable wealth, and the Lady Violante was his only heiress. Besides that, of course the position of her great-uncle as Legate rendered her all that was desirable as a match for the noblest of the province—not to mention other grander possibilities in the background. The reigning Pontiff was a very aged man. The Cardinal di Marliani was thought to stand very well at Rome. Who knew what might happen? It would have been too monstrous if the hope of such a marriage as this were to be endangered by a silly fancy for the pretty face and slim figure of a little artist.

The Marchese Lamberto had felt his position to

be a difficult one. He really did not know what line it would be wisest to take. Ludovico had spoken among his associates at the Circolo in a manner which had effectually silenced all light allusion to the ladies in the Strada di Santa Eufemia. He could not speak exactly in the same tone to his uncle; but the hints that the Marchese Lamberto had from time to time thrown out to the effect that, under the circumstances of the case, he did not approve of his nephew's intimacy with the Signorina, Paolina Foscarelli, had been received in a manner by the younger man which had warned the elder that some caution was required in the task of guiding his nephew in this matter. He had never had much cause to be dissatisfied with his nephew's conduct, or with his behaviour towards himself: but some years before the present time, he had been made aware that the Marchese Ludovico was one of those whom it is easier to lead than to drive; and that any attempt at a little too much driving would be likely to lead to kicking, and perhaps to an entire breaking of reins and traces.

And, being a man of sense, he had acted on the hints thus given him with considerable success. The Marchese Ludovico had submitted on most occasions to be led with all desirable docility. But now, in this

matter, wherein judicious leading was more than ever before in his life necessary to him, he seemed to decline to be led at all.

How could the perplexed Marchese do otherwise than frown when he was told that his nephew was not at the Circolo at that hour of the evening, knowing very well where such absence showed him to be? Yet he probably would have done, or attempted to do, something else,—or, at all events, the frown would have been a yet heavier and blacker one,—could he not only have guessed where his nephew was at that moment, but have also heard what was passing in the little *salottino* of the Strada di S. Eufemia.

Some account of the conversation there may perhaps serve the purpose of saving all necessity for a detailed account of the intercourse which had taken place between Ludovico and Paolina during the last eight months. The story of it will be sufficiently understood from a peep at its result.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEACHING OF A GREAT LOVE.

PAOLINA had been working all day in the church of San Vitale. She had very nearly completed the copies she was to make there; and they were the most important in extent of all she had engaged to execute. It had been necessary to erect a scaffolding for the purpose of bringing the artist sufficiently near to her subject; and the permission to have this done had been obtained by the all-powerful interest of the Marchese Lamberto. Many an hour had Ludovico passed on that scaffolding by the artist's side as she plied her slow and laborious task; and many a "Paul" had the old sacristan pocketed with a grin of understanding, as he had opened the door of the church to the young Marchese, the object of whose visit he had long since learned to understand.

And Paolina herself? Did she approve of these visits made thus in the perfect seclusion of that old

church at the hours when its doors were shut to the public? Did she like the hours so spent in *tête-à-tête* conversation with the handsome young Marchese. She, who had so readily found the means to make the *entreprenant* Conte Leandro keep his distance, and had succeeded in disembarrassing herself of him altogether,—could she find no possible means for avoiding the assiduities of the Marchese Ludovico; could she not at least have induced old Orsola to accompany her in the church of San Vitale, as she had accompanied her in the gallery at Venice.

Perhaps old Orsola did not like climbing up a ladder to a scaffolding. Perhaps she had the superstitious dislike to an empty and lonely church not uncommon to uneducated Italians. The fact was at all events that, even after Ludovico had, upon more than one occasion, brought the rushing blood into the dark face of Paolina by surprising her at her work on the scaffolding near the vaults of the church, old Orsola never made her appearance there. She was always at her place on one side of the fire during the visits of the Marchese to the *quartiere* in the Strada di Santa Eufemia in the evening; but it was equally true that she almost always went to sleep.

It is so natural and so desirable that the old

should sleep under such circumstances and on such occasions! It is so evidently for the benefit of all the parties concerned, that the tendency may be reckoned among the instances of beneficent adaptation with which the whole order of Nature is filled!

It can hardly be doubted,—Ludovico could hardly be blamed for the persuasion—that Paolina did like his visits. It may be pretty safely assumed that those blushes, which greeted the appearance of his head above the planks as he climbed to the scaffolding, were not painful blushes. How early in those eight months it came to pass that her heart leaped at the click of the huge old key in the lock, as the sacristan admitted Ludovico by a turn of it which, as she had well learned, heralded his coming, it might be hard to say. Paolina herself could not probably have told this to her own heart. But that such had come to be the case long before the evening when the Marchese Lamberto sought his nephew at the Circolo, and could not find him, can hardly be doubted.

Thus much having been admitted, it seems as if there might be reason to fear that Paolina may appear worthy of censure to those of her own sex, to whom her story is here commended, to a degree which truth, and an acquaintance with times, places,

and national manners, would not quite justify. But in these matters of national appreciation, of fitness and unfitness, and of propriety and impropriety, the *nuances* are so fine and subtle, that it is somewhat difficult, in trying to explain them, to say just what one means without seeming to say more than one means.

One thing is clear. Paolina was as thoroughly and essentially modest and innocent a girl as ever breathed; but she was so "by the grace of God,"—from natural idiosyncrasy and instinctive purity of heart, that is to say, rather than from teaching of any kind, or from any knowledge of good or evil. She was an orphan, the child of parents who were "nobody," and she was left in the world to find her own way in it as she could. So much the more, replies the prudent English matron, ought she to have been extra careful lest the breath of misconception should even for a passing moment sully her. It is the sentiment of a people, who, "aristocratic" as they may be, do really feel that that which is best and purest in the highest lady of the land may be, and should be, also the heritage of the lowliest. But such is not practically the feeling in those social latitudes where Paolina was born and bred.

The breath that tarnishes the clear mirror of a noble damsel's name, says and teaches that social feeling, brings dishonour to a noble race; and she has failed in her duty to her race. But who could be injured by any light word spoken or light thought thought of such an one as poor Paolina? She was an "artist." What treason to art, what *lèse-majesté* against the beautiful in every one of its manifestations, to conceive that in that fact any reason was to be found why a less nice conduct in such matters should be expected of her! And yet, for reasons which it would take a volume to elucidate, so it is, that in the countries where art is deemed to be most at home, and where it is in the largest degree the occupation of large sections of the people, it is deemed that a less strict rule with reference to the matters under consideration is laid on them than on others. What if a young female artist "perfectly free from ties," as would be urged, and whose conduct in such a matter could hurt nobody,—what if such an one chose to form a tie not recognized by the Church? The Church herself would look very leniently on the venial fault. And though Paolina was such as she has been described, it was impossible but that such notions, not specially set forth or taught, but per-

vading all the unconscious teaching of the world around her, should have rendered her less sensitively anxious as to the possibility of misconception lighting on her, than an equally good English girl would have been. Could she have been indifferent to the danger that slander should tarnish her good name? asks an Englishwoman. But the whole world in which she lived would not have felt it to be slander. It would have been too much in the ordinary course of things.

How Paolina felt in the matter, Ludovico was made to understand on that evening which has been so often referred to; and the reader may gather from the conversation that passed between them.

Paolina had worked hard all day. The mosaics in San Vitale were nearly finished. Ludovico had been with her on her scaffolding during the few hours of light of the short afternoon. He had become sensible that the intercourse between him and Paolina had latterly been growing to be less frank, unreserved, and easy than it had been. He had once been quite sure that Paolina loved him with the whole force of a thoroughly virgin heart. He had latterly begun almost to think that he had been mistaken in her. She would turn from him. She would fall into long silences. She was embarrassed in speaking to him;

and it had often happened lately that talk had passed between them, which had seemed as if they were speaking at cross-purposes—as if there were something not understood or misunderstood between them.

And Ludovico had come to the house in the Strada di Sta. Eufemia that evening, safely relying on the expectation that the Signora Orsola would go fast asleep, and determined to bring matters to an understanding between him and Paolina.

"You can hardly, I think, doubt, *Paolina mia*, that I love you dearly,—far more dearly than anything else on the face of the earth. Do you not see and know that all my life is devoted to you? You do *not* doubt, darling, do you?" said Ludovico, as he sat holding one of her hands in his.

She sat silent for awhile, and with her face turned away from him, though she made no attempt to take her hand from his.

"You do not doubt it, Paolina?" he asked again.

"If I did doubt it,—if I had doubted it, Ludovico, you could not have taught me the lesson which you have taught me—the lesson which you well know you have so thoroughly taught me, to love you. We neither of us doubt of the love of the other. But——."

She still continued to sit with her face averted from him; and, after another pause, finished her speech only by a little sad shake of her head.

Now the truth was that Ludovico often did doubt very much whether Paolina really loved him. He did not understand the position in which they stood towards each other at all. Here was a little utterly unpretending artist, dependent on no one but herself, owing no duty to any one, to whom he had been making love for the last eight months, as he had never in his life made love before, who assured him that she loved him;—how was it that she had not been his mistress months and months ago? How to account for so strange a phenomenon? He knew very well, that if the exact truth of his position with regard to the little Venetian artist were known or guessed at by any of the men with whom he lived, he would have appeared to them an object of the utmost ridicule,—a dupe,—a fool of the very first water. What on earth could he have been about all the time?

And there were moments in which he was tempted to think the same of himself;—bitter moments of cynical world-wisdom, in which he scoffed at himself for having been led to play the part he had played for

these last eight months. He would resolve at such moments to "speak plainly" to Paolina; and, if such plain-speaking failed of the effect it was intended to produce, to put her out of his mind and never waste a minute or a thought upon her again.

But such plain-speaking had never got itself spoken,—had seemed, when he was in presence of the intended object of it, utterly impossible to be spoken. And as for the other alternative, he knew at the bottom of his heart, that it was as much out of his power to put it in practice, as it was to forget his own identity.

Something there was in the girl different from anything he had ever known in any other specimen of the sex he had ever become acquainted with. Something too there unmistakably was in his feeling towards her very different from aught that he had ever felt before. What spell had come over him? And what the deuce was the nature of her power over him? And what the deuce was her own meaning, and feeling, and the motives of her conduct?

It really was necessary, however, that they should in some way come to understand each other. If he had been becoming for some time past discontented with the state of matters between them, it was

evident that Paolina had been becoming ill at ease and unhappy also. In some fashion or other some more or less plain speaking was evidently needed.

And Paolina herself? What was her feeling on the subject? Whence did her unmistakable *malaise*, distraught behaviour in Ludovico's presence, paling cheeks, hours of reverie, when she should have been busily at work—whence did all this come? What was really in her mind when she told him that doubtless they both loved each other, and then ended her words with a "but," and a sad shake of her drooping little head?

She had found this man, her first acquaintance, in a strange land, good-natured, pleasant, kind, useful, handsome, protecting and, at the same time, deferential in his manner; and she had liked him. He had delivered her from the Conte Leandro, and there had come into her mind comparisons between the two men. He had been on her side in that matter; they had wished the same thing, and had accomplished it against a third person; there had been, as it were, a secret between them on the subject; and hence had grown a bond of union. She had advanced from liking to admiring. Thence to the consciousness that she was admired. She had

gone onwards through the usual phases of surprising herself in the act of thinking of him at all sorts of hours, and gradually discovering that he filled an immense portion of her lonely life there in the strange city, till she came to the stage of mingling the avowal "*Gli voglio tanto bene*" with her last prayers to Mary Mother by her bedside at night, and meditating on the words he had said and the looks he had looked, after she had laid her head upon the pillow.

She had thus quietly walked onwards into the deep waters of a great love, before any question had ever suggested itself to her as to whither she was going, and whether there might not be danger of perishing in those deep waters.

Now nothing is clearer or more undoubted by every good and well-conditioned girl among ourselves, than the certainty that any man who unmistakably seeks to win her love either means and hopes to make her his wife, or is merely fooling her for his own abominably selfish amusement, or is insulting her and endeavouring to injure her in a manner that makes it at once her duty and her inclination to spurn him from her with horror and loathing.

But here, again, as the lawyers say, "locus regit actum." That which the English girl feels, under such circumstances, so naturally, that she deems it an inseparable part of her nature that she should so feel, she feels because of the teaching of the whole social atmosphere in which she has lived. The Italian girl, in the position of Paolina, does not feel it, because she has lived in a very different social atmosphere.

It is quite certain that Paolina,—if the question, whether it was in anywise on the cards that the Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare had conceived, or was likely to conceive, any project of marrying her, Paolina Foscarelli, had suggested itself, or had been suggested, to her at any time during those eight months,—would at once have replied to her own heart or to any other person, that such an idea was utterly preposterous and out of the question.

But he had been striving to convince her that he loved her by every means in his power for months past, and had succeeded in so convincing her. Was he merely playing with her? That idea never entered into her head. As she, with sad and transparent frankness, had told him, neither of them could doubt the love of the other. What doubt could remain, then,

as to the alternative? What doubt of the atrocious nature of his designs and intentions towards her? No doubt at all. Ought she not, therefore, with the intensest scorn of what-do-you-take-me-for-sir indignation to have repelled the insult offered to her?

Poor Paolina had no conception that any insult at all was offered to her or intended. Ludovico was minded to offer to her that which it was in his power to offer, for her to accept if it suited her, or to decline if it suited her not. The species of tie that he offered her was all he could offer her. It was one very frequently offered and very frequently accepted in similar cases. Had the possibility that she might one day accept such been suggested to her, it would have produced no horror in her mind. She had no conviction during all these eight months that she never could or would accept such a position from any man. Why, then, did not matters proceed harmoniously and smoothly between them? Why had not Paolina become Ludovico's mistress before this time? What was the meaning of the averted face, and of that broken off "but——" which she had found it so difficult to follow with a completed sentence?

The meaning was, that Paolina's own heart, during those hours of reverie filled with the meditation of her love,—during those pourings forth of her confessions of love to her heavenly confidant in her bedside prayers,—during her nightly review of the love-passages of the day, — her own heart, as it became clearer to her, had revealed to her, that she could not accede to any such proposal as that which, she was well persuaded, the Marchese could alone offer to her;—had revealed it to her, not in obedience to any moral principle; — not by any what-do-you-take-me-for process of indignant virtue; but by an instinctive feeling irresistible and not to be gainsayed, that the love she had to bestow must possess its object wholly and entirely, or not at all. It was quite a matter of course that Ludovico would marry some lady in his rank of life. She was not ignorant of the position in which he stood with regard to the Contessa Violante. And his openness to her on this subject is a curious indication of the very wide difference between the mode in which the whole subject would be looked at by both parties in the world in which they lived, and in our own.

Philosophers, as the result of much learned observation and long reasonings, come to the con-

clusion that monogamy is best suited, on the whole, to the nature, the requirements, and progressive improvement of mankind. A pure-hearted woman, who loves with a true and great love, finds a shorter cut to the same conviction.

And the growing depth and earnestness of Paolina's love had arrived at teaching her this with unmistakable clearness. She might pine, might die —might compel her heart to turn to stone;—might seek the refuge of a cloister, which is the southern equivalent for suicide;—but she could not—she felt she could not live and be content to share her lover's love with another. It was not any sensation of the nature of jealousy so much as an unconquerable feeling that not to have all was to have nothing; —that she must have all and for ever;—that she and he must be one;—one flesh and one spirit.

Of course all this ought to be taught, and is taught to all respectably educated young persons in more regular and didactic fashion. But to poor little unschooled Paolina it was taught not less authoritatively by the greatness and the purity of her own love.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHANGE IN THE SITUATION.

"NEITHER of us can any more doubt the love of the other, Ludovico *mio!*" Paolina had said in reply to his pleading, "but——

"But what, *tesoro mio?* What 'but' can come between us, if there is no such doubt to come between us?" urged Ludovico, gently drawing her towards him by the hand he still held locked in his own.

Again Paolina paused some minutes before replying, less apparently from hesitation to speak what was in her mind, than because she was applying her whole mind to the better understanding of her own meaning.

"It is not, that I doubt whether you love me, Ludovico *mio!*" she said at length, but still without turning towards him; "I know you love me truly and well. But I sometimes think, that you do not love me in the same way that I love you. I never knew before that there could be different ways of

loving. But now it seems to me,—and I have thought so much, oh, so much of it,—that somehow you look less to the whole of everything,——how can I say what I mean?—less to all our lives, and all our selves, in your love, than I do."

"What can you mean, Paolina? A different way of loving! I know but of one way!" said Ludovico with a somewhat *banal* flourish.

"What would become of me, Ludovico *mio*," she said, now looking round into his face, with a look in her deep true eyes, that made him feel for the moment as though all the world were truly as nothing to him, in comparison with her love;—"what would become of me, if you were to cease to love me? I should wither away, and die. It is probably what *will* happen to me!"

"Paolina!" he exclaimed, in a voice of strong reproach.

She put her hand upon his shoulder, as if to beg him to let her complete what she wished to say; and continued,—

"But what would happen to you, if I were—it is impossible, but *if* I were—to cease to love you? would not that show you, that there is a difference between w ays of loving?"

"No, *cara mia,* it would shew no such thing. Look now, Paolina! They tell of lovers' perjuries. But I never said one word to you that I did not believe to be true. Nor will I ever do so. Were you to be taken from me, by your own heart, and your own act, or in any other way, I do not believe that I should wither and die. But it does not follow, that I should suffer less. I should live on, not because my love is weaker, but because my body is stronger than yours. God grant that such a lot may never befall me."

"It never can befall you, *amor mio!* but, Ludovico, you could not only live, but you could love—some other woman;" she uttered the words with a little gulp of emotion, and continued: "Do you imagine, that if I lived to a thousand years, I could ever love any other than you?"

"What right have you to say, Paolina, that I should ever, or could ever love another but you?" said Ludovico, indignantly.

"Nay, Ludovico, must you not do so always? Are you not professing to do so even now? Are you not promising your love to the Contessa Violante? will she not have a better right to your love than I?"

Ludovico started, and drawing himself a little back from Paolina, looked at her with reproachful surprise.

It was not that he was surprised at learning that she was aware of his engagement to the Contessa. He had, as has been said, concealed nothing from her in that respect. But he was vexed, and surprised at the feeling she manifested on the subject.

"You surprise me, Paolina!" he said. "Would it have been better if I had concealed all this from you? Many men,—most men perhaps, in similar circumstances—would have done so. But I cannot treat you in that way. I have been, and would always be open and sincere to you in all things. You know all about this match. You know that it is a family arrangement, managed by my uncle. You know, that if I wished it ever so much, I can't avoid it. You know, or ought to know, that it is not, and cannot be a matter of affection in any way. You know that in the world, such marriages are arranged and are known and understood to be arranged, for reasons, and on grounds, with which love has nothing to do. Does not all Ravenna know, including the lady herself doubtless, that I am to marry her because she is the great-niece of the Cardinal Legate? Can I be expected to love her, because she is the Cardinal's niece? Surely, my Paolina, you are not speaking or thinking of this matter, with your usual good sense!"

"I can't help it, Ludovico; I am, at all events, speaking with my whole heart!" she said in a tone of profound sadness. "If what you say is true,—and do not imagine, dearest, that I have the smallest doubt that all you say to me is entirely and perfectly true,—just think of the lot of that *povera Contessa* Violante! *Poverina!* I dare say she,—think of the wrong I should be doing her! Think how she would hate me!" She shuddered as she spoke. "Nobody, I think, ever hated me yet," she continued; "and it seems to me so horrible to be hated. And more horrible still to know that I should be justly hated! And then, *tesoro mio!*—Mio!—How could I ever say *mio?* Never, never, never, *mio!*" she cried, bursting into passionate tears. "No, never mine! The very word itself, which comes so naturally to my lips, tells me, like a knell in my heart, that it can never be!"

"But, Paolina, *angiola mia*," said Ludovico, who had heard her with a look of consternation, "what has thus changed you? For it is a change. You knew all these things before. What has occurred to put such notions into your mind all of a sudden?"

"Not all of a sudden, Ludovico! The blessed Virgin knows for how many sad and solitary hours I

have been thinking, and thinking, and thinking of all this! She knows how many nights I have passed in tears to think of it. What has put it into my head, you say? Ludovico, it is my love for you that has put it into my head! It is my strong love that has opened my eyes, and made me see that I cannot —cannot—I mean—that I cannot share your love with another!"

The words came forced from her with a great effort, and with a sob that seemed as if it would choke her.

"Oh my Paolina, what words are these?" said he, his own voice trembling with trouble and emotion.

"It is true, Ludovico! It is my true love that has opened my eyes. I fear that I have done very wrong; and the blessed Saints know that I shall have my punishment! I have done wrong in loving you, and letting you love me! But I did not know it, I did not think, I did not see where I was going! I ought to have known that love was not for a poor girl like me! I ought to have known that evil and misery would come. But till I loved you with my whole, whole heart, Ludovico; and till I found out that I did, I did not know that—that it would be so,—that I should feel as I feel now."

Ludovico got up from his seat, and began walking up and down the floor of the little room, sighing deeply, and passing his hand again and again across his forehead. Presently he sat down again, bringing his chair so as to front her fully as he sat.

"Paolina," he said, looking sadly into her eyes with a deeper meaning in his own than she had ever seen there; "your words have made me very, very miserable! I never in all my life was so unhappy as I am now. You must listen now, my Paolina, to what I am going to say; and you must think well before you answer me. You see, dearest, that it is necessary that we should quite understand this matter, and understand each other. Many men, if they had been told what you have now told me, would begin to reproach a girl with not loving them, —to say that it was clear she did not care for them. I will not do so. I will not pretend to think that you do not love me. I know that you do, as well as you know that I love you with my whole heart. And with this knowledge in both our hearts, think what is the meaning and the end of what you have been saying. You know that this marriage is inevitable! And the consequence of it is to be that

we two are both to be broken-hearted,—to condemn ourselves to pass loveless lives,—to give each other up,—see each other no more,—make all the future a blank to both of us. Good God, Paolina! You cannot mean that!"

"When you have married, Ludovico *mio*,—when I have said those dear words for the last, last time, you will have plenty of things to make you forget your poor Paolina! And for me, I shall be heart-broken doing no wrong to any other, instead of heart-broken and doing terrible wrong all the time! And, dearest, it would be worse than heart-break. I could not—it is stronger than I am! It seems like a new horrible thing shown to me, which I never saw or thought of before! When it comes close to me I shudder at the thought——."

"At what thought, Paolina? At the thought of my being married to the Contessa Violante?" asked Ludovico, looking steadfastly into her eyes.

She bore his gaze without withdrawing her sad, still eyes for awhile, thinking deeply before she answered.

"No, Ludovico; not at the thought of your being married to the Contessa Violante! That is a thought which may break my heart. But it does not

make me shudder, as that other thought does;—the thought of—of—of loving one, who—who—who owes his love to another; the thought of taking by stealth whatever share of love may be given to me stolen from the rightful owner. Never! never! never! Would you then be mine,—all mine, for ever, and ever, and ever! Oh, my love, my love! If you don't understand this, love has not opened your eyes as it has mine. Do you think that I could endure the thought of being married to another man? The bare notion is horror—*horror*—HORROR! Would I not rather die this minute; ay, or die a thousand times!"

Again Ludovico got up from his chair and paced the room, sometimes stopping abruptly in apparently deep thought, and sometimes resuming his walk with every appearance of despair in his face and gestures. It is needless to say that Paolina had spoken the very inmost truth that was in her heart in all its entirety; but she had also succeeded in making him feel that it was so.

There is often a feeling in a man's mind on such occasions—a feeling too closely allied to selfishness—which leads him to be dissatisfied with what seems to him the unwillingness of a woman to make

sacrifices to her love. And often a woman, knowing this, and calculating mostly falsely, is urged to yield by a desire of proving that she does not deserve such a suspicion. But Ludovico had no such thought in his mind. He knew that Paolina had not only spoken truly, but had represented her mind accurately. It was not that she "respected herself." The poor child had never received any lessons which could teach her such respect. She had been perfectly ready to accept the social position of Ludovico's mistress, until the power of a great, true, and pure love had unsealed the eyes of her understanding, of her imagination, and of her heart to the nature—not of the social position of such a tie as that proposed to her—but of the absolute imperious necessity of sharing such a love with none. Putting all notion of principle, of duty, of the understood expediency of conforming to laws divine, and human, out of the question, such a love as Paolina felt demands this with a cogency of insistence that *cannot* be set aside. And the man who hopes, or flatters himself, or suffers himself to be persuaded that such a love has been given to him upon any other terms, is—he may rely upon it with the certainty due to an eternal law of nature—deceived. The quality of

the love which may have so been given to him is of a different kind.

After awhile Ludovico came again and stopped directly in front of the chair in which Paolina was sitting; but he remained standing, and placing his two hands, one on either of her shoulders, and looking down into her face with moist eyes, he said,—

"My love, my true and best—my only love! I cannot lose you, Paolina; I cannot give you up. Truly—truly I had rather that any other thing—any other evil that could happen, should happen to me. We are, and we must be, all in all to each other, my Paolina, now and ever. There is no alternative possibility to this. Love has opened my eyes, too, my darling angel! *Your* love has opened my eyes; I will know no other love,—no other woman—call none other wife but you! Paolina, you will be mine?—my all? my only one?"

"Ludovico!" she exclaimed, looking up at him with an ecstasy of joy, and yet with a great terror upon her face; "but what will happen—what will happen to you? What will be done to me?"

"We must see, my heart's treasure! We must have patience; you must trust to me. You do trust me, *non è vero?* I must put off this marriage;—

then find means to break it. And, after all, what can my uncle do? I am dependent on him while he lives; but I must succeed to all he has when he dies. My promised wife! Are you mine—mine for ever? Will you now put your dear little hand in mine, and promise me, and have faith in me, and wait for me, and have patience till I can see my way, and love me all the time, my own—my darling?"

"I am your own, Ludovico;—yours, any way: to live for you, if such a lot may be mine; to die still yours, if it may not! Wait! Patience! What shall tire my patience? So I know that you are loving me—me only—all the time, I shall ask nothing more! But, oh, I am so frightened! And then I shall be a cause of such mischief and trouble to you. Would it not have been better for you if you had never seen poor Paolina?"

"No, no, no, no! It would have been a thousand million times worse for me! Be of good heart, my treasure; nothing can hurt you. We must keep our secret for a while; and nothing will hurt me, if we manage well. But I must think; my mind is in a confusion;—a joyful confusion, dearest! But I must think it all over. If you see me less often, be sure that it is because I am planning for our happiness.

And now, darling,—my own, my own, now really and for ever, my own—one kiss to seal our contract! You won't refuse me that. I take you thus in my arms, my Paolina, for the first time as your promised husband. Good-night—good-night—my own! I trust I may be able to think of what I am doing at the Palazzo to-night. Good-night, my own!"

And thus the Marchese Ludovico returned that evening to the Palazzo Castelmare, about an hour after Signor Ercole Stadione had quitted it, pledged to find some means of breaking off the match with the Contessa Violante Marliani, to which all Ravenna was looking forward, and engaged to be married to the little obscure Venetian orphan artist.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

LUDOVICO DI CASTELMARE did not see his uncle that evening. He returned to the Palazzo, thoughtful enough, direct from the house in the Strada di Santa Eufemia, and there learned that the *Impresario* had been with the Marchese; that he had brought the good news of his success in having engaged "La Lalli" to sing at Ravenna during the coming Carnival; and that he, Ludovico, had been sent for by his uncle from the Circolo. What for, the servant could not tell him. He could only say that the Marchese had seemed much put out at the Signor Marchese Ludovico's absence, and that he had shortly afterwards gone out to pass the remainder of the evening at the palace of the Cardinal Legate.

Ludovico was by no means so anxious to see his

uncle as to wait to do so till he should return at night. He betook himself to his own *quartierino,* locked the door, and sat down to think.

He had said no more than the truth to Paolina when he professed that he had never spoken a word with the intention of deceiving her. Nor had he been otherwise than entirely sincere in all that he had just been saying to her. Nevertheless he felt, somewhat more strongly and clearly, perhaps, than while he had been looking into Paolina's eyes, that he had undertaken rather a tremendous task in declaring that he would break off the projected marriage with the Lady Violante, the great-niece of the Cardinal,—a match which both families considered to be definitively arranged, and which was expected and looked forward to by all Ravenna, and that for the purpose and with the view of making so terrible a mésalliance as that he contemplated. The Marchese Ludovico felt all the weight of the inheritance of a great name and a still greater social position, which devolved upon him from his uncle. It was bad enough to contemplate the effect which would be produced, as regarded himself, by the step he contemplated. But it was perfectly terrible to think of the effect it would produce on the Marchese Lamberto. Ludovico was

proud, in his more easy-going way, of the position he occupied as his uncle's nephew in the society of the city; but it was not to him the breath of his nostrils as it was to his uncle.

He felt, as a weak man is apt to feel in similar positions of difficulty, that the best and quickest, and, above all, the easiest, way out of all embarrassment would be to run away from it—to quit Ravenna, and give it up—it, and all its inhabitants for ever. He could do this. He felt that Paolina would be worth such a sacrifice. But how to accomplish such a step while his uncle lived?

As it was all he could do was to procrastinate, he thought of the old Italian proverb, "Gain time, and you will pull through," and he determined to profit by the wisdom of it. Even procrastination would not be without difficulty. But something might be done in that way,—some time might be gained. And then there was always that never-failing resource and consolation of those who, in the words of Horace, limit their ambition to adapting themselves to circumstances instead of adapting circumstances to them, something might turn up; though, for the present, it was difficult to see what that something could possibly be, unless it were the death of his

uncle, a perfectly robust and healthy man in the fiftieth year of his life.

Might possibly the something take the shape of a change or mitigation of Paolina's resolve? No sooner did the idea cross his mind than he felt ashamed of it, and his heart smote him for having for a moment harboured a thought that involved falseness to his promise to her. Nevertheless, it was not the last time that the thought recurred.

The next morning he met his uncle.

"I had Stadione with me yesterday evening," said the Marchese, "and I wanted to speak to you about something he said. I was sorry to be told that you were not at the Circolo."

"I was sorry that Beppo did not find me. What was it? Signor Ercole has succeeded in his mission, I hear."

"Yes; and it was on that matter I wanted to speak to you; but this morning will do as well for that. It was not that that vexed me, Ludovico. I won't ask you to tell me where you were, and I don't want to play the inquisitor; but the fact is, I know very well without asking. And, my dear nephew, I cannot but tell you that you are acting unwisely,—imprudently even."

"What have I done that is wrong, sir? Is it not fitting that I should show some attention to people who came here recommended to you, and whom you yourself first commissioned me to assist?" said Ludovico.

"What is the good of answering in that way, Ludovico. Just as if we both did not know better than that, and know too what we both mean? Pay some attention! Pshaw! Do you think that I am quite a fool? As if I did not know what you go there for, and what you have been going there for these eight months past, since first I was blockhead enough to throw that pretty girl in your way. Now, *figliuolo mio*, it is my duty to tell you that that sort of thing won't do—just at present. I don't want, as I said, to play the inquisitor, nor do I wish to play the preacher. When you are married you must guide your own conduct as you may think fit; but now every consideration of propriety and prudence should teach you that you must not continue to run after that young person in the sight of all the town in the way you do. Here you are on the point of contracting a marriage, which——"

"On the point, uncle? We are surely a long way from that yet?" said Ludovico.

"A long way! I don't know what you mean by a long way; if we are not further advanced, it is your own fault. We might bring the negotiation to a conclusion at once. It might all be settled this Carnival.

"This Carnival, uncle? Impossible! I must have a little time. There are so many things to be thought of."

"What is there to be thought of, that has not been thought of already? They are in no hurry; they look upon the matter as arranged. But in decency, we cannot show any backwardness; it does not look well.

"Well, uncle: at all events, let this Carnival pass over. Let me have this last Carnival; then Lent is of no use: after that we will see about it."

"Well, be it so. But, my dear boy, you know all the importance of this marriage! You know how desirable it is in every point of view;—family, rank, station, influence, money,—though that happily we have no need to seek; why, it was only last week,—this is a secret, and must go no further, but I know I can trust to your discretion;—only last week, that I got a letter from my old friend, Monsignore Paterini at Rome, in which he speaks in almost open terms of

the chance, and even probability, that our Cardinal might—ahem!—find the next conclave a particularly interesting one. You know how Paterini stands at Rome, and that a hint from him is as good as a volume from another; and just think of the possibilities that such a contingency might open before you! I won't say any more; but *do* now during this Carnival, show yourself a little more at the palace, and pay a little attention, and let the world see that you occupy the place with regard to the Contessa Violante, that you really do occupy. *Basta!*"

"I will do the best I can, sir, to merit your approbation," said Ludovico, feeling that he was expected to say something, and not well knowing how to do it.

"And now about the matter I wanted to speak of last night. La Lalli comes to us, you see, for the Carnival: it is a great triumph for Ravenna. She is certainly the first singer in Italy, since England with its brute power of money, robbed us of poor Sparderini. But between you and me, *figliuolo mio*, we should never have got her, if there had not been certain difficulties—certain scandals,—*che so io?*—at Milan. All that is no business of ours, you know, *tutt' altro!* But there has been talk;—stories have got about!—mere calumny probably, as Signor Ercole very justly

remarked,—but it is very desirable that such things should not be the talk of the town here. It is *mauvais genre* to chatter about such matters. You can make it *mauvais genre* among the youngsters at Ravenna, if you choose. Do so; you understand! That's all."

"Perfectly, uncle! *Lasci fare a me!* I'll see to it; though I confess I do not quite understand why we need trouble ourselves about any such gossip," said Ludovico, delighted to be able to fall in with his uncle's wishes in something.

"Well, I should have thought that you might understand. In the first place I don't want it to be said or imagined, either here or elsewhere, that Ravenna has taken up with a singer, who could not get an engagement elsewhere. Not that that is the case by any means. But don't you see, if it is said that she was obliged to leave Milan, it puts us in the position of a *pis aller!* And I don't like that. In the next place, I don't want to have light talk about a person whom I have had so large a share in bringing to the city. These are things you ought to learn to think of, *carò mio!*" replied the Marchese, a little annoyed at having to put his feelings on the subject into such plain words.

"I'll take care that things shall be as you wish. When is she to arrive?" asked Ludovico.

"About the end of the year—in a month's time or thereabouts. Stadione did not mention whether the day of her coming had been fixed. Her first appearance will be on the night of the Beffana, the 6th of January."

"Because they were talking at the Circolo of getting up some little matter of welcome,—taking the horses from her carriage, and drawing her in, or something of that kind, and a *serenata* of course. Leandro is busy already with a poem for the occasion, you may swear!"

"*Bravo! bene!* If only our good friend the Conte keeps his muse within tolerable limits! It would not do to quite smother her in verse on her first arrival; and, you know, our good Leandro has rather a special gift that way. Well, get up any kind of *dimostrazione* you like for the occasion,—it will all help to give *éclat* to our opening. You can arrange all about the when, and the where, &c. with Stadione. We are going to have a meeting of the Belle Arte Committee here this morning. They'll be here directly!" said the Marchese Lamberto, pulling out his watch.

"One word more, uncle, before I'm off," said Ludovico.

"What is it?—money, I suppose?" said the Marchese, again taking out his watch.

"No, sir; not money this time,—unless, indeed, you insist on it," said the nephew, laughing.

"Not at all, not at all! I won't press it on you by any means!" said the uncle in a similar tone; "but what were you going to say?"

"Why, with reference to what you were saying just now, about the Signorina Foscarelli," replied Ludovico, in quite a different tone. "I am always anxious to shape my conduct in accordance with your advice, uncle. You see La Foscarelli has all but finished her work at St. Vitale, you know: she is to do her copying in the Cardinal's Palace next, for you have kindly arranged for her permission to do so. Now, she can't very well go to the palace, for the first time, alone, you know! If you had not expressed the opinions you have on the subject, I should have gone with her, thinking no harm. But perhaps—to the palace, you know,—it would be better, if you would not mind it, to accompany her, for the first time, yourself."

"Very right, very properly thought of, my dear

boy! Yes; I can go with her—or I can send Burini, which will come to the same thing."

"No, uncle; not the same thing—to send a mere *maestro di casa,*—a servant! It would not be nice for the poor girl; it would make all the difference with the servants and people at the palace: if I avoid going with her to please you, you will go with her yourself, won't you?"

"Very well, very well; I'll go with her. If any man has more to do of his own than all the rest of the city put together, there are sure to be other folk's affairs thrust on him also; it has been so with me all my life. Well, I will find half an hour somehow."

"Thanks, uncle! Good-by, I wish you well through your meeting."

"We shall see each other at dinner?"

"Yes. *A rivederla!*"

CHAPTER X.

THE CONTESSA VIOLANTE.

The Contessa Violante Marliani lived, as has been said, with her great-aunt, a sister of the Cardinal. They occupied a small house nearly contiguous to the palace, which was almost more their home than their own dwelling. The Marchesa Lanfredi, the Cardinal's sister, though a great-aunt, was not yet sixty years old. She had been left a childless widow, very scantily provided for, early in life, and had retired from Bologna, her husband's native place, to live first at Foligno, of which city her brother had been bishop, and afterwards at Ravenna, to which he had been subsequently promoted. The Cardinal was six or seven years her senior. His elder brother, the grandfather of the Lady Violante, had inherited the family estates in the neighbourhood of Pesaro, and had died, leaving them to his

only son, Violante's father, when the latter was a very young man.

This Conte Alberto Marliani had married for love, as it is called. That is to say, that he had not married for any of the reasons for which marriages among people of his rank and his country are usually made; but had been attracted by a pretty gentle face seen in a Roman ball-room. The pretty gentle face had remained always gentle; but had soon ceased to be pretty.

The Contessa Marliani was inclined to devotion. The Conte was very much disinclined to anything of the sort. He soon got tired of his wife, repented of his marriage, and commenced an active system of breaking her heart. It was not a very difficult task, for she was as gentle in spirit as in face. He completed it when his only child Violante was about nine years old. But he had also completed, much about the same time, the entire dissipation of the never very large Marliani property. And it so happened that, very shortly afterwards, his own career was brought to a conclusion, which his relatives felt to have overtaken him a few years too late! He was travelling from Rome down to Pesaro to complete the sale of the last portion of

the estates, the proceeds of which had been anticipated, when he was very opportunely drowned in attempting to cross the Tiber swollen by flood.

The little Violante, thus left an almost destitute orphan, was nevertheless a personage of some importance. She was the only remaining scion of the family; and the position of her great-uncle seemed to promise a renewed period of prosperity and fortune to the old name. Violante was the Cardinal Legate's natural and sole heir. The Cardinal was a very rich man; and in amassing wealth and attaining honours, he had, like a true Italian, never thought the less of the additions to, and provisions for, the fortunes and splendour of the family name, which he was winning, because he was himself a priest, and would leave no heirs of his name. The peculiarities in the position of a sacerdotal aristocracy have engrafted the passion of nepotism in the hearts, as well as the practice of it in the manners, of the members of Rome's hierarchy.

Generally the family tie is a stronger one among the Italians than among ourselves. In the upper classes, it is certainly so; and, probably, among all classes. It may be thought strange, perhaps, that this should be the case with a people whose lives are

supposed to be less pervaded by the sentiment of domesticity than our own. The explanation may, however, perhaps be found in the greater and more frequent disruption of family ties, which is caused by that more active social movement, which pushes our younger sons away from the parental stock in search of the means of founding families of their own.

And one of the results of the Italian mode of living and feeling is seen in the very common family ambition of Churchmen.

The little Violante then, as has been said, was a personage of some importance, at least in the eyes of the Cardinal and his sister; and when she was left an orphan, was at once taken to live with her great-aunt, under the auspices of her Cardinal great-uncle. Both of those remaining members of the family would have preferred that the one remaining scion of the race should have been a boy; but—— when the young Contessa should be married, of course her name should be thenceforward borne as part of that of the family into which she should marry,—as is so commonly the case in Italy, (many of the oldest and most illustrious names in the peninsula having survived to the present day solely

by virtue of such arrangements); and the Marliani be thus saved from extinction.

The young Contessa Violante, when she reached the age of young-ladyhood, had not the "fatal gift of beauty." Some people think that such a deprivation is the most unfortunate from which a woman can suffer. Others maintain that the absence of beauty is, upon the whole, no real misfortune. But however philosophers may settle this question, it can hardly be doubted that no young girl devoid of beauty, was ever yet persuaded that to be unattractive in appearance, was otherwise than a very, very sore affliction and misfortune. Nature often kindly mitigates the blow by making the unlovely girl unconscious of her want of beauty. But this was not the case with the young Contessa Violante Marliani.

Violante knew that she was not beautiful, or even pretty. Probably in her own estimate of herself she exaggerated her plainness. She was one of those persons who have not the gift of self-deception. Neither was she elegant in person. And yet there was something about her bearing, which would have prevented any one from imagining that she was other than a high-born lady. There was strong evidence of intellect in her face; and it was doubtless from

within that came that quiet dignity of bearing that marked her.

And it was a dignity compatible and combined with the most perfect gentleness and almost humility of manner;—a dignity arising not from the consciousness of any high position or high qualities, but from the consciousness of that sort of gentle passive strength, which knows that no external circumstance, or difficulty, or pressure will avail to make its owner step but a hair's breadth aside from the path which conscience has marked as that of right and duty.

Violante was tall and slender, but her figure was not graceful. People did not say of her that she was slender; they said she was thin. And that was incontestably true. She was very thin. But her shoulders were high and square, and there was a sort of angularity and harshness about all the lines of her person. Her head seemed somewhat too large for her body; and the upper part of it seemed too large for the lower portion. She had a large, square forehead, white enough, but strongly marked with inequalities of surface, which, however much they might have delighted a phrenologist, were not conducive to girlish comeliness. Her hair was of

the very light reddish quality, which has not a single touch in it of that rich sunny auburn, which makes so many heads charming, red though they be. Her face was perfectly white, yet not clear of complexion. And the pale grey eyes beneath their all but colourless brows completed the impression of a general want of vigour and vitality.

A little before the end of that year in which the Ravenna *impresario* performed his memorable journey to Milan with the results that have been recorded, Violante di Marliani reached her twenty-third birthday; a few months before that day the Marchese Ludovico had reached his twenty-second. It was a difference on the wrong side, but not so great as to form any serious objection to the proposed match. But twenty-three is a rather mature age for an Italian noble lady to reach unmarried. That such should have been the case with the Signora Violante was by no means because no suitor for her hand had ever presented himself. Several such aspirants had entered the lists. For the Contessa Violante was the great-niece of her great uncle. But some of these had appeared objectionable to the Cardinal and his sister;—who also were not at all likely to forget all that was due to the prcspects arising from such a

relationship, and all that it implied; and all of them had been objectionable to the young Contessa herself.

Violante's expectations, indeed, in that line, or in any other of all the different ways in which happiness may come to mortals in this world, was very small. For the first nine years of her life she had lived the only companion of a very miserable mother. And all that mother's misery had apparently come from the fact of her having a husband. Those first years of the child's life had been very sad, very monotonous, very depressing. Perhaps the effect of them did but confirm the speciality of an idiosyncrasy, which would have been much the same without them. But, at all events, when the child was brought to the house of her great-aunt, it seemed as if her mind and character had been too long and too uniformly toned to accord with sadness, for happiness to have any power of taking hold of her.

The old Marchesa Lanfredi, who took the young Contessa under her roof, and under her care, was not a bad sort of woman in the main; but she was thoroughly and consistently worldly, and judged everything from a worldly point of view. The Contessa Marliani was an important little lady in her eyes;

and was treated by her with an indulgence and consideration which she would have considered out of place in the case of a child not born to such expectations and such a destiny. She was not contented with her young relative; but was more perplexed and puzzled by her than angered. And as Violante grew towards womanhood, her great-aunt understood her less and less.

In the first place, she had a much stronger tendency towards devotion than the Marchese Lanfredi thought either natural or becoming in a young woman. Of course it was right and proper to pay due attention to one's religious duties; there was no necessity to tell her, a Cardinal Archbishop's sister, that, it was to be supposed. But she had a strong objection to excess in such matters. And to her mind Violante carried her devotional practices, and yet more her devotional ideas, to excess. Of the latter, indeed, the old Marchesa Lanfredi disapproved altogether. Young people had no ideas upon the subject in her time;—and the world was certainly a better world then than it had been since.

And then, worst of all, it gradually became evident to the Marchesa's mind that there was a more or less

direct connection in the way of cause and effect between her niece's religious notions and feelings and the strange readiness she had shown to find objections to both of the two persons who had been judged by her family to be admissible suitors for her hand. The Marchesa began to entertain a strong apprehension that her niece had conceived the idea of "entering into religion;" *i.e.* of becoming a nun.

It had been necessary at the time of Violante's first coming to live with her aunt, to select a governess for her; and a lady had been found fitted to teach her all that it was proper for a noble young Italian lady to know. But when she became seventeen it was judged expedient to change this lady for another. A different sort of person was required. Custom and the habits of life and convenience of the Marchesa made it expedient that a duenna should be provided to attend on the young Contessa; but she was supposed no longer to need an instructress.

The person selected for this trust was not perhaps altogether such as might have been desired. By some fatality, arising probably from some latent incompatibility between the institution itself and the

eternal order of things, it would seem as if the persons entrusted with that responsible situation rarely did turn out to be exactly the right people in the right place. Perhaps in the case of the young Contessa Violante her great-aunt had sought to find some attendant and companion for her who should have a tendency to correct that too great proclivity to retirement from the world—to a life in which religion was the chief interest and occupation, and to a sad and unhopeful view of the world around and before her—which she lamented in her niece.' If so, the choice she made was not followed by the results she hoped from it; and was attended by other inconveniences.

The Signora Assunta Fagiani, the widow of a distinguished Bolognese professor of jurisprudence, was certainly quite free from all those dispositions which the Marchesa regretted in her niece. But she was not altogether discreet or judicious in the method she adopted for reconciling the young girl to the world, and to worldly views and hopes and objects.

She very soon perceived that to Violante the consciousness of her own want of personal attractions was, despite her yearning for a life to be filled with thoughts

and objects to which beauty could contribute nothing, a source of bitter and ever-present mortification. There was inconsistency, doubtless, in regret for the deficiency of personal attraction in persons who, with perfect sincerity, declared to themselves that to enter a convent was their greatest object in life. But Violante was not aware that if the beauty had been there the devotional aspirations would not have been there! That, which causes more deeply implanted in her nature than she knew of were impelling her to desire and to yearn for, the imperfect teaching of the world around her had led her to imagine to be unattainable save by the gifts of personal beauty. And, knowing that if that were so there was no hope for her, her bruised heart had sought the only refuge which seemed to be open to such misfortune.

The Signora Fagiani's first attempt at finding a remedy for this state of things consisted of a vigorous endeavour to persuade her pupil that her own estimate of her personal appearance was altogether a mistaken one. All the former experience of the old lady led her to consider this an easy task. And she was much surprised to find that her insinuations, assertions, and persuasions on this

subject were totally thrown away on her pupil. The precious gift of personal vanity had been denied to poor Violante; and she saw herself somewhat more unfavourably than others saw her.

Then the duenna changed her tactics; and strove to point out how very little a pretty face signified to any girl in the position of the Contessa di Marliani. To a poor girl, indeed, whose face was her fortune, it was another matter. But the niece of the Cardinal Legate! . . . Bah! Did she imagine that she would lack suitors? She had nothing to do but to make the most of the advantages in her hand, and she would see herself surrounded by all the beaux, while the prettiest girls in the room might go whistle for the smallest scrap of attention. And then, when married, with rank, station, wealth at her command, what would it signify?

And in urging all these considerations, the Signora Assunta Fagiani spoke at least sincerely, and expended for the benefit of her pupil the best wisdom that was in her.

Partly, however, she was working for her own purposes, as well as for the advantage, as she understood it, of her charge. Of course, as she judiciously considered, her position gave her, in a great

degree, the valuable patronage of the disposal of the Lady Violante's hand in marriage. And, of course, this advantage of her position was equally well understood by others; and among these by a certain Duca di San Sisto, a Bolognese noble, whose sadly-dilapidated fortunes much needed the aid that might be derived from the coffers of the wealthy Cardinal Legate. The Duca di San Sisto had interests at Rome also, which might be most importantly served by the influence of the Cardinal Marliani. So that a marriage with the Lady Violante seemed to be exactly the very thing for him. But the cautious, and carefully-masked inquiries which the Duke had set on foot, after the fashion in which such things are done in Italy, had brought him the information that a marriage was almost as good as arranged between the lady in question and the Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare, an old acquaintance of the family. Were it not for that impediment, the Duke thought that he might have good reason to hope that his plan might succeed.

Now it so happened that the Signora Assunta Fagiani was an old friend of the Duca di San Sisto; and when the widow of the professor of jurisprudence was promoted to the important post she held in the

household of the Marchesa Lanfredi, that nobleman did not fail to find means for securing the continuance of her friendship. It was the object and purpose, therefore, of Signora Assunta Fagiani that the Lady Violante should become in due time Duchessa di San Sisto, and not Marchesa di Castelmare. But she understood her position quite well enough to be aware that the end she had in view must be approached cautiously and patiently.

Violante had, of course, been informed at the proper time that her family destined her to become the wife of the young Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare. Now, if Violante's temper and disposition had been other than it was; had she been able to think of herself differently from what she did; had it been possible for her, in a word, to have supposed that the Marchese Ludovico loved her, he was the man whom she could most readily have taught herself to love. They had been, to a certain degree, acquaintances from an early period of their childhood. He was the only young man she had ever known with anything like the same degree of intimacy; and Ludovico, as we know, was not devoid of qualities calculated to win a lady's love.

But Violante knew right well that Ludovico did

not love her, and that there had never been any probability that he should do so; and, had she any lingering doubt on the subject, the good Assunta took very good care to dispel it. And there was a bitterness in this knowledge which did much towards producing in Violante the state of mind that has been described. She was not in love with Ludovico, but she had liked him—he was the only man she had ever liked at all. She knew that she was to be married to him if he could be persuaded to marry her, and if she were sufficiently obedient to marry him. She thought that no man could ever love her, and she knew very certainly that this man did not. Her own hope and firmest purpose, therefore, was, if such resistance to the higher authorities might in any way be possible to her, to avoid a marriage with Ludovico di Castelmare: if possible to her, she would fain escape from any marriage at all. If this should be altogether impossible, then the Duca di San Sisto, as well as anybody else. It was not that she had any hope that the Duca di San Sisto would love her: but, at least, it had not been proposed to him to love her, and found impossible by him to do so. At least the unloving husband would not be the one man whom she felt she might have

loved had he deemed it worth his while to ask her love.

Yet, with all this, Violante had not learned, as perhaps most women in her place would have done, to hate Ludovico for having found it impossible to love her,—for having condemned her to feel the *spretæ injuria formæ*, which so few of the sex can ever forgive. Had she ever reached the point of loving him it might, perhaps, have been otherwise. As it was, she was too gentle, too humble, in her estimate of her own worth and power of attraction to be angry with him: and yet she was sufficiently interested in the matter to listen not unwillingly to all the gossip that the Signora Assunta poured into her ear about Ludovico, tending to show that he was unworthy of pretending to her hand.

Assunta's object, of course, was to break the match with the Marchese di Castelmare for the sake of bringing on one with the Duca di San Sisto.

Violante's object, it has been said, was to avoid any marriage at all — specially that immediately proposed to her; and the stories, which from time to time Assunta brought her of the goings on of Ludovico, had a double interest for Violante. In some sort, all such intelligence was acceptable to her,

as tending to make it unlikely that her only escape from a loveless marriage with him would be by her own resistance to the wishes of her family. Yet, at the same time, it was bitter to her, and ministered an unwholesome aliment to her morbid self-depreciation.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CARDINAL'S RECEPTION, AND THE MARCHESE'S BALL.

On the first day of the New Year, according to long-established custom, there was a grand reception in the evening at the palace of the Cardinal Legate. It was to be, as always on that occasion, a very grand affair. All the diamonds, and all the old state carriages, and all the liveries in Ravenna were put in requisition. Old coats, gorgeously bedizened with broad worsted lace of brilliant colours, and preserved for many a year carefully, but not wholly successfully, against time and moth, were taken by fours and fives from the cypress-wood chests in old family mansions, where they lay in peace from year's end to year's end if no marriage or other great family solemnity intervened to give them an extra turn of service, and were used to turn dependants of all sorts into liveried servants for the nonce; and

nobody imagined or hoped that anybody else would look upon this display as anything else than absolute and frank ostentation. Nobody supposed that any human being would be led into believing that this state indicated the ordinary mode of life of the persons who exhibited it. Everybody in Italy has been for so many generations so very much poorer than his forefathers were, that such a state of things has long since been accepted by universal consent as a normal one; and it is understood on all hands that these fitful displays of the remnants of former grandeur, this vain revisiting of the glimpses of the moon by the ghosts of long-departed glories, shall be taken and allowed as protests on behalf of the bearers of old noble names to the effect that their ancestors did really once live in a style conformable to their ideas—that they perfectly know how these things should be done, and would be found quite prepared to resume their proper state, if only the good old days of prosperity should come again.

And there is the good as well as the seamy side (not, alas, to the old liveries! for they had been mostly turned and turned again too often); but to the feelings and social manners which prompted such a manifestation of them. At least, in such a

condition of social manners and feelings mere wealth was not installed on the throne of Mammon in the eyes of all men. If one of the old coaches was more pitiably rickety than the rest; if the ancient-fashioned coat of some long-descended marchese was itself as threadbare as the old family liveries; if some widowed contessa had crept out from the last habitable corner of her dilapidated palazzo, where she was known to live on a modicum of chicory-water, brought in a tumbler from the nearest café, and a crust; not on any such account was there the smallest tendency towards a derisive smile on the lip, or in the mind of any man, at these pitiable attempts to keep up appearances, which everybody considered it right to keep up. Not on any such account was the stately courtesy of the Legate's reception in the smallest degree modified. It was subject, indeed, to many modifications; but these were wholly irrespective of any such circumstances.

There is a peculiar sort of naïveté about Italian ostentation, which robs it of all its offensiveness. Nobody exhibits their finery or grandeur for the sake of crushing another; nobody feels themselves crushed by the exhibition of it. The old noble who turns out his gala liveries and other bedizenments on a festal

day, does it to make up his part of the general show, which is for the gratification of all classes, and is a gratification to them. But it is a curious commentary of the past history of Italy that, as between city and city, there *is* the feeling, the wish, and the ambition, to crush and humble a rival community by superior magnificence.

Nobody expected much immediate gratification from attending the Cardinal's reception. There was little to be done save to bow to the host and to each other. Ices were handed round—none the less because it was bitterly cold—and cakes and comfits. Old Contessa Carini, who had a grandchild at home, and no money to buy bonbons with, emptied half a plateful of them into her handkerchief, the old servant who handed them helping her; and the Cardinal, who happened to be standing by, smilingly telling her to give the little one his benediction with them. The brave old Contessa still kept her carriage, as it became a Carini to do; though she starved her poor old shrivelled body to enable her to keep her half-starved horses. And "society" gave her its applause for struggling so hard to do that which it became her to do in the state of life to which it had pleased God to call her; and no soul in the room

dreamed of thinking the less of her because of the sharp poverty that confessed itself in her eagerness to make the most of the opportunity of the Legate's hospitality.

The Conte Leandro Lombardoni had a bilious headache the following morning in consequence of over-cramming himself with cakes and sweetmeats. One active-minded old gentleman originated the remark that the cold was greater than had been known in Ravenna for the last seven years; and this fact, repeated again and again by most of the company to each other, supplied the material of conversation for the first half-hour. Then somebody alluded to the circumstance that, whereas it had been said that La Lalli was to have arrived before the end of the year, the fact was, that she had not yet come: and thereupon the Marchese Lamberto had authoritatively declared that the lady had been detained by an unforeseen circumstance of no importance, and would infallibly reach Ravenna on the evening of the 3rd.

And thenceforward this interesting news formed the sole topic of conversation till the carriages were ordered; and all the finery was taken home again to be laid up in lavender till that day twelvemonth.

There was to be, also according to annual custom, the first ball of the Carnival at the Palazzo Castelmare on the following evening; but for this the state trappings reserved for the Legate's reception on the *Capo d'Anno*, were not required.

The balls given by the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare every Carnival were the grand and principal gaieties of Ravenna. The whole of the "society" were invited, and to be prevented from going by illness or any other *contretemps* was a misfortune to be lamented during all the rest of the year. At the Palazzo Castelmare people really did expect to enjoy themselves. There was dancing for the young, cards for the old, and eating and drinking for all. For the Palazzo Castelmare was the only house in Ravenna at which suppers were ever given. There three balls and three handsome suppers were provided for all the society of Ravenna every year! And the first of these always took place on the 2nd of January; the *Capo d'Anno* being left for the state reception at the Legate's palace.

Well might little Signor Ercole Stadione say, what would become of Ravenna if anything were to happen to the Marchese Lamberto!

All the people came much about the same time;

and there was then half an hour or so, before the dancing commenced, during which the main object and amusement of the assemblage was to escape from a misfortune, which it was well known the Conte Leandro meditated inflicting on the society. He was known to have written a poem for the opening of the new year, which was then in his pocket, and which he purposed reading aloud to the company, if he only could get a chance! He was looking very pale, and more sodden and pasty about the face than usual, from the effects of his excesses at the Legate's the night before. But his friends had no hope that this would save them from the poem, if he could in anywise obtain a hearing.

"Take care, he is putting his hand in his coat-pocket! That's where it is, you know; he'll have it out in half an instant, if we stop talking! Oh, Contessina, you are always so ready! Do invent something to stop him, for the love of heaven!" said a young man to a bright-looking girl next him.

"Oh, Signor Leandro, since you are *riconciliato con bel sesso,*" said the Contessina, alluding to words which, to the great amusement of all Ravenna, Leandro had written in the album of a lady who

asked the poet for his autograph,—"since you *are* reconciled to the fair sex, will you be very kind and see if I have left my fan where I put off my shawl in the ante-room?"

"Bravo, Contessina; now let us get to another part of the room, before he gets back. Oh, Ludovico," he continued, addressing the young Marchese Castelmare, whom they encountered as they were crossing the room, "for the love of heaven, let us begin! Make the musicians strike up, or we shall have Leandro in full swing in another minute!"

"I assure you, Signor Ludovico, the danger is imminent!" said the Contessina.

"When I saw him at work last night at the Cardinal's pastry, I thought he must have made himself too ill to come here to-night," said the former speaker; "but I suppose poets can digest what would kill you or me!"

"If Leandro begins to read, I vote we all are seized with an invincible fit of sneezing," said another of the grown-up children.

"Well, we may as well begin at once; I will go and tell the Contessa Violante that we are ready," said Ludovico, moving off.

It was a matter of course, that he should open the ball with the Contessa Violante,—not only by reason of her social standing in the city, but because of the position in which he was understood to stand towards her.

Violante was sitting at the upper end of the room between her great-aunt and the sister of the Marchese Lamberto, Ludovico's mother. She was very handsomely dressed in plain white silk, but was looking pale and dispirited. When Ludovico came up and offered his arm, bowing low as he did so, she rose and accepted it without speaking.

"I had almost made up my mind," she said as soon as they had moved a pace or two towards the middle of the large ball-room, "not to dance at all to-night: I am not well."

"Oh, Signorina, how unfortunate! What a disappointment! But it would be cruel to force you to dance, when it is against your inclination," said Ludovico, with a very unsuccessful attempt to put a tone of tenderness into his voice.

"I will not do so, after this dance," said Violante; "but I suppose we *must* dance the first dance together!"

"I am sorry it should be a matter of such dis-

agreeable duty to you, Signora Violante," said Ludovico in a tone of pretended pique.

"It is equally disagreeable to me to dance with any other partner; I am not well, as I have told you, Signor Ludovico; I have no business to be here; I think my health becomes weaker from day to day. And the blessed Saints only know when—it may be possible to think of carrying into effect the arrangements desired by our parents!"

"I am sure that mine would not wish to urge you on the subject to—to decide more quickly than you would wish to. I can assure you, Signora, nothing would be more contrary to my own feelings than to do any such violence to yours. Indeed I may say——"

"Yes, yes! I think I understand all about it, Signor Ludovico. Might it not be possible to find means of pleasing all parties in this matter, if only all parties understood each other, Signor Ludovico?"

She dropped her voice almost to a whisper as she said these last words, with a rapid furtive glance at his face.

"And now," she added, speaking in a louder tone, "we had better give our minds to the present

scene of the farce, and perform the opening quadrille, as is expected of us!"

"I am truly sorry, Signora, that you should be called upon to do this sort of thing, when you are so unwell, as to make it even more disagreeable than it might be to you otherwise. But believe me," continued he, speaking in a low voice, and with an emphasis that indicated that his words had reference rather to what she had spoken to him in a similar tone than to the words of his own which had immediately preceded them,—"believe me that it is my wish to meet your wishes in all respects."

There was a jesuitism in this speech, which did not recommend it or its speaker to the Contessa Violante. She would have been far better pleased by a more open reply to the confidence which she had half offered. She only said in reply:

"I am disposed to think, that such is the case in the matter which more nearly concerns us both, Signor Ludovico, than anything else. But—although we knew just now that we had to dance together, it was you who had to ask me, you know, and not I you. Very little active power of influencing her own destiny is allowed to a girl; come, we had better attend now to the business in hand!"

There was nothing more, except such ordinary words between each other or the others dancing in the same set, as the dance itself led to, spoken by the Contessa and Ludovico. The former declined all other invitations to dance, and went home at the earliest moment she could induce her aunt to do so.

There was much talk going on in all parts of the room as to the announced coming of the great singer on the morrow. The young men settled together the last details of their plans for the triumphal entry of the "Diva;" and the ladies were by no means uninterested in hearing all that their cavaliers had to tell them on this subject. Much was said, too, about the qualities of La Lalli both as a singer and as a woman. Everybody agreed that she was admirable in the first respect; and there was not a man there, who had not some anecdote to tell, which he had heard from the very best authority, tending to set forth the rare perfection of her beauty, and the wonderful power of the fascination she exercised on all who came near her.

She was to arrive quite early on the morrow. It was understood that she purposed passing the previous night,—that night in short, which those who were discussing her were spending at the

Castelmare ball, at the little town of Bagnacavallo, a few miles only from Ravenna. Such a scheme looked,—or would have looked in the eyes of any other people than Italians,—rather ridiculously like the ways and fashions of royal progresses, and state entries into cities. But the Ravenna admirers of the coming "Diva" neither saw nor suspected the slightest absurdity; and it is to be supposed that La Lalli knew all the importance of first impressions, and that she did not choose to show herself to her new worshippers for the first time under all the disadvantages of arriving tired and dusty from a long journey.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE "DIVA."

On the morrow of the Marchese's ball was the great day of the arrival of the divine songstress. And it was as lovely a day for the gala doings, which had been arranged in honour of the occasion, as could be desired. A brilliant sun in a cloudless sky made the afternoon quite warm and genial, despite the general cold. An Italian sun can do this. Where he shines not it may be freezing. As soon as he has made his somewhat precipitous exit from the hard blue sky, the temperature will suddenly fall some ten degrees or more. But as long as he is in glory overhead, it is summer in the midst of winter.

Three o'clock had been named as the hour at which the coming "Diva" would reach the city gates. But the plans which the young habitués of the Circolo had arranged for receiving her, had been

in some degree modified. The scheme of harnessing their noble selves to her chariot-wheels had been abandoned; and instead of that it had been understood that the Marchese Lamberto would himself go in his carriage to meet her a few miles out of the city and bring her in. The Marchese Ludovico and the young Barone Manutoli were to accompany the Marchese Lamberto, and to assist in receiving the lady; but were to return to the city in the carriage which she would leave, on getting into that of the Marchese, or in any other way that might seem good to them. The Marchese Lamberto and the lady alone were to occupy his handsome family equipage. There was to be a band of music in attendance, which would precede the carriage as it entered the city; and some half-dozen young officers of a regiment of Papal cavalry, which chanced to be then stationed at Ravenna, intended to ride at each door of the carriage as it returned to the city. Altogether it was to be a very brilliant affair. And all the gay world of Ravenna was on the tiptoe of expectation and delight.

The Marchese Lamberto, indeed, looked upon his share in the pageant as a great bore. He had had to put off one or two more congenial occupations for

the purpose of doing on the occasion his part of that which he deemed his duty to the city. Professor Tomosarchi, the great anatomist, who was at the head of the hospital, and curator of the museum, was to have come to the Palazzo Castelmare that morning to show the Marchese an interesting experiment connected with the action of a new anodyne; and Signor Folchi, the pianist, was to have been with him at one, to try over a little piece of the Marchese's own composition. And both these appointments, either of which was far more interesting to the Marchese Lamberto than driving out in the cold to meet the stage goddess, had to be set aside.

Nevertheless, he had deemed it due to his own position, and to the occasion, to grace this little triumphal entry with his presence. If he had left it wholly in the hands of his nephew, and the other young men, it might have been the means of starting the Signora Lalli amiss on her Ravenna career in a manner he particularly wished to avoid. After that little hint on the subject, which the *impresario* had given him, he was specially desirous that anything like an occasion for scandal should be avoided in all that concerned the sojourn of the Signora Lalli

in Ravenna. He, the Marchese Lamberto, the intimate friend of the Cardinal, and the most pre-eminently respectable man in Ravenna, had had a very large—certainly the largest—share in bringing this woman to the city; and he was anxious that the engagement should lead to no unpleasant results of any kind.

It might be very possibly that the little matters at which the *impresario* had hinted, were not altogether calumnious;—that the lady might be one of those members of her profession who seek other triumphs besides those of her own scenic kingdom, and the story of whose lives in the different cities they visit is not confined to the walls and to the records of the theatre. It might very well be that a little caution and looking after was needed in the matter. It would be as well, therefore, to take the thing in hand at once in a manner that should put the lady on a right course from the beginning;—all which could be excellently well accomplished by at once taking her, as it were, into his own hands; and would, on the other hand, be endangered by throwing her from the first into those of the youngsters who purposed going out to meet her.

So the Marchese sacrificed himself; put off the

anatomist and the musician; spent the morning in arranging all the details of the proposed cavalcade with the young men who were to compose it; and at two o'clock got into his open carriage to drive out towards Bagnacavallo. The young Barone Manutoli and Ludovico were in the carriage with him. But it was understood, as has been said, that they were to leave it when they met the heroine of the day, who was to enter Ravenna with the perfectly *safe* and unattackable Marchese alone in the carriage with her.

"I wonder whether she is as lovely as she is said to be?" said Manutoli, as they drove out beyond the crumbling and ivy-grown brick wall, which had helped to repel the attack of Odoacer the Goth; but which had, some thirteen hundred years ago, failed to keep out the mischief brought into the city by the comedian Empress Theodora, whose beauty had promoted her from the stage to the throne.

Absit omen! And what, indeed, can there be in common between Goths and Greeks of the Lower Empire, who lived thirteen hundred years ago, with the good Catholic subjects, and the quiet Catholic city of our Holy Father the Pope, in the nineteenth century!

At all events, it may be taken as very certain that no omen of the sort and no such thoughts were present to the minds or fancies of any of those who were about to form the escort of the modern actress.

"All who have ever seen her, speak in the most rapturous terms of her great beauty," said Ludovico, in reply to his friend's remark.

"Don't be too sure about it, *figliuoli miei*, or it is likely enough you may be disappointed," said the Marchese Lamberto. "People repeat such things one after the other; there is a fashion in it. I have always found that your stage beauty is as often as not no beauty at all off it; and then you know stage work and the foot-lights are terribly quick users-up of beauty. And La Lalli is not at the beginning of her career. But what have we to do with all that! *che diavolo!* She is a great singer; she comes here to delight our ears, not our eyes!"

"But time and work make havoc with the voice as well as with the face and figure, Signor Marchese!" said Manutoli.

"Not to the same degree, Signor Barone, and not quite so rapidly," replied the Marchese, with the manner of one laying down the law on a subject

of which he is an acknowledged master. "Of course a voice which has done much work, is not the same thing as a perfectly fresh one! *A chi lo dite?* though, observe, you very often gain more in knowledge, and in perfection of art, than you lose in freshness of organ. But with proper care, voice, though a perishable thing, is not so rapidly and fatally so, as mere beauty of face; that is sure to go very soon. I have not troubled myself to inquire, as you may imagine, much about the state of La Lalli's good looks. But I have informed myself of the condition of her voice, as it was my duty to do. And I think that in that respect, which is the only one we need care about, the city will find that we have not done badly."

"For my part, I confess a *romanzo* comes very specially recommended to my ears from a lovely mouth!" said Ludovico; "and I fully expect to find La Lalli quite up to the mark in this respect. I shall be disappointed if she is not."

"From all I have heard, we shall none of us be disappointed!" said Manutoli.

"We shall see in a few minutes!" returned Ludovico, looking at his watch.

"There's something in the road now, I think, as far as I can see!" said Manutoli, who had stood up

in the carriage, holding the rail of the driver's seat with one hand. The road stretched long and flat, in a perfectly straight line before them for a great distance. "Yes," continued he, "there is certainly something coming along the road;—a carriage by the quickness with which it nears us: now for it!"

"Tell him to draw up, Ludovico; and he might as well turn round so as to be ready to drive back. We will wait here till she comes; and our friends on horseback may as well remain here too," said the Marchese.

So the little party drew up, and all eyes were turned to the small cloud of dust rapidly approaching them.

"Yes: it is a carriage, and no mistake; and coming along at a good pace too!" said Manutoli.

"It is she, no doubt; she was to sleep at Bagnacavallo," returned Ludovico.

"Signori!" said the Marchese, addressing the four or five mounted officers, "will you kindly put your horses across the road, so that the lady's driver may see that he is to stop, and that there may be no mistake."

And then an open carriage became clearly visible, and in the next minute, it could be seen that it was

occupied by two persons;—a lady and another figure—an old man apparently—muffled in a huge blue travelling-cloak.

Then in another instant the travelling-carriage, finding the road blocked before it, had stopped, and in the next, the Marchese Lamberto, hat in hand, was standing at the door of it, on the lady's side;—the two young men standing immediately behind him, and the horsemen crowded round, craning over the necks of their horses.

Oh! per Bacco! There is no mistake about it; she is startlingly beautiful. Report had not said half enough. And, somehow or other, it appeared as if a travelling-costume was specially becoming to her. At least, it seemed so to the innocent youths who so first saw her. Had there been any women present their minds would have at once gone back from the splendid effect produced to all the details of the artfully combined causes which had gone to the producing of it. But there were no ladies present, save the "Diva" alone.

Such a Diva! She wore a little blue velvet hat, with a white feather in it very coquettishly placed on a superb wealth of hair of the richest auburn tint. She was very delicately fair, with just such an

amount of the loveliest carnation on her cheeks as might be produced by the perfection of health and joyousness and youth; or *might be*, a lady critic would have whispered, by some other equally effectual means. She had large—very large—wide-opened, clear, and limpid light-blue eyes, with that trick of an appealing look in them which always seems to say to every manly heart, "You, alone of all the harsh, cold, indifferent crowd around us, are he to whom I can look for sympathy, comprehension, and fellow-feeling." And now these eyes looked round from one to another of those around her with a look of smiling, innocent surprise and inquiry that demanded an explanation of the unprecedented circumstances with a childish freshness the most engaging.

She wore a bright blue velvet pelisse, trimmed with ermine, which admirably showed to the greatest advantage her magnificently shaped bust, and round slender waist; and bent forward towards the Marchese, as he stood at the carriage-door, with inimitable grace of gesture, and a smile on her sweet lips that would have utterly defeated and put to shame any St. Antony exposed to such temptation.

"Signora," said the Marchese, who looked very handsome, as he stood with his hat in his hand, and

bowed with stately courtesy, "Ravenna welcomes you, and places itself at your feet in our persons. Permit me to present to you these gentlemen, who have had the good fortune to be selected among many aspirants to that honour, to assist me in welcoming you to our city: the Barone Adolfo Manutoli; my nephew, the Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare."

"*E Lei dunque è il Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare?*" said the lady, in the sweetest possible of silvery tones, and with an air of humble wonder at the greatness of the honour done her, mingled with grateful appreciation of it, that was inimitably well done; and held up two exquisitely-gloved slender little hands, as she spoke, half joining them together in thankful astonishment, and half extending them towards him with an almost caressing movement of appeal.

"*Sì, Signora;* I am the man you have named; I am fortunate that my name should have reached your ears; more fortunate still in having had a part in making the arrangements that have brought you here;—and most fortunate of all if I shall be so happy as to make your sojourn among us agreeable."

"*Signor Marchese! Lei è troppo garbato,—troppo buono; ma troppo buono, davvero!*" said the pretty creature; and the appealing eyes looked into his with the semblance of a tear of emotion in them.

"Will you allow me the pleasure, Signora, of conducting you to the city in my carriage?" said the Marchese, with a graceful wave of his hand towards his handsome equipage. "I have thought it might possibly be agreeable to you to place it and myself at your disposition on this occasion."

"*Ma come?* It is too great an honour, *davvero.* But to make my first appearance in your city under such auspices will go far towards assuring me such a success at Ravenna, as it is my most earnest wish to attain."

The Marchese put out his hand to assist her to alight, as he added,—

"Perhaps you will allow these gentlemen to return in your carriage, Signora? They have no other here. I did not think it necessary to bring a second carriage."

"*Come loro commandano!*—as their lordships please," said La Lalli with a graceful bow; though the young men were of opinion, that her eyes very

plainly said, as she glanced towards them, that she would have preferred that they should have returned in the same carriage together.

She rose, as she spoke, and giving her hand to the Marchese, put one foot on the carriage-step in the act of descending, and then paused to say, as if she had forgotten it till that moment:

"Will you permit me, Signor Marchese, to present my father to you, Signor Quinto Lalli? I never travel without his protection!"

The old man in the corner moved slightly, and made a sort of bow with his head. He had remained quite still and passive in his cloak and his corner all through the rest of the scene, taking it all apparently as something very much in the common order of things. Perhaps the piece that was being played had been played too often in his presence to have any further interest for him.

While thus presenting her father, as she called him, to the Marchese, the beautiful actress had remained for the moments necessary for that purpose, with her matchless figure poised on the one dainty foot, which she had stretched down to the step of the carriage. The attitude certainly showed the *svelte* perfection of her form to advantage; and

from the unavoidable circumstances of the position, it also showed one of the most beautifully formed feet that ever was seen, together with the whole of the exquisite little *bottine* that clothed it, a beautifully turned ankle, and perhaps as much as two inches of the silk stocking above the boot.

The mere chance that caused the lady to bethink herself of presenting her father just at that moment, was thus quite a piece of good fortune for the young men on foot and on horseback, who were standing around, which no other combination of circumstances could have procured for them.

Then the Marchese handed her with graceful gallantry to his carriage, took the place in the back of it by the side of her; and the little cavalcade began its return to the city. At a small distance from the walls, they found the band stationed, and thus preceded by music, and passing through all the *élite* of the population in the streets, the Marchese conducted her to the Palazzo Castelmare, and handed her up the grand staircase to the great saloon, where all the theatrical world of Ravenna, and many of the more notable patrons of the theatre, were assembled to receive her.

Signor Ercole Stadione, the little *impresario*, was

there of course, and in high enjoyment of the triumph of the occasion, and of the importance which his share in it reflected on him. He buzzed about the large saloon from one group to another, raising himself on tiptoe as he looked up into the faces of his noble friends and patrons, and rubbing his hands together cheerily in the exuberance of his satisfaction.

"You had the happiness of accompanying the illustrissimo Signor Marchese to receive our honoured guest to-day, Signor Barone!" said he to Manutoli, who was giving an account of his expedition, and of the first appearance of the new "Diva," to a knot of young men grouped around him; "*mi rallegro! mi rallegro!* Ravenna could not have had a more worthy representative than yourself, Signor Barone! But is she not divine! What beauty! What a grace!"

"Why, Signor Ercole, one would think you had begotten her yourself. She is a pretty creature certainly. What a smile she has!"

"*Eh bene, Signori miei!* Are you satisfied? Are you content? Have we done well?" said the little man, buzzing off to another group. "*Che vi pare?* Is she up to the mark, or is she not?"

"Bravo, Signor Ercole! We are all delighted with her!" said one.

"If she sings as she looks," cried another, "Ravenna has a prima donna such as no other city in Italy has."

"Or in Europe, *per Bacco!*" added a third.

"What do you think of her, Signor Leandro? Did I say too much?" asked the happy *impresario*, moving off to a console, against which the poet was leaning in an abstracted attitude, while his eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, managed nevertheless to look out for the manifestation on the Diva's face of that impression which he doubted not his figure and *pose* must make on her.

"What a bore she must find it having to talk to all those empty-brained fellows that have got round her there, just like buzzing blue-bottle flies round a sugar-barrel! I wonder it does not occur to the Marchese that it would be more to the purpose to present to her some of the brighter intelligences of the city. She must think Ravenna is a city of blockheads! And one can see with half an eye, that is the sort of woman who can appreciate intellect!"

"It will be for you, Signor Conte, to prove to her that our city is not deficient in that respect.

Sapristi? Would you desire a better subject? What do you say to an ode, now, on the rising of a new constellation on the shores of the Adriatic? *Hein!* Or an impromptu on seeing the divine Lalli enter Ravenna through the same arch under which the Empress Theodora must have passed?"

"I had already thought of that," snapped the poet, sharply.

"Of course you had," said the obsequious little man. "An impromptu, by all means! You could have it ready to present to her at the theatre to-morrow."

"Unless the Marchese thinks fit to present me to the lady presently, I shall decline to write anything at all," rejoined Signor Leandro, thus unjustly determining, in his ill-humour, to punish all Ravenna for the fault of one single individual.

The Diva was, in the meantime, winning golden opinions on all sides. She had bright smiles, and pretty captivating looks, and courteous, prettily-turned phrases for all. But amid all this she contrived unfailingly all the time, by means of some exquisitely subtle *nuance* of manner, to impress every person present with the unconsciously-conceived feeling that there was something more between her and

the Marchese and his nephew than between her and anybody else in the room; that she in some sort belonged to them, and was being presented to the society under their auspices. She remained close by the side of the Marchese. She would look with an appealing and inquiring glance into his face at each fresh introduction that was made to her, as if to ask his sanction and approval. She had some little word from time to time either for his ear, or that of his nephew, spoken in such a manner as to reach those of nobody else; while, gracious to all, she delicately but markedly graduated the scale of her graciousness towards those who were introduced to her, according to the degree of intimacy which seemed to exist between them and the Marchese. The result was that the Marchese, without having been in the least conscious by what means and steps it had been brought about, felt, by the time the gathering was at an end, a sort of sense of proprietorship in the brilliant and lovely artiste;—it was so evidently he who was presenting her to the city! She herself so evidently felt that it would become her to rule her conduct in all respects at Ravenna according to the Marchese's wishes and ideas, and there was so sweet and so subtle a flattery in the way in which she

made this felt, that when, after all the crowd had retired, and she was about to take leave of the Marchese to go to the lodging that had been prepared for her, she ventured to take his hand between both hers, while looking up into his face to thank him, in a voice quivering with emotion, for his kindness to her, there passed a something into the system of the Marchese from that contact of the palms that he found it very difficult to rid himself of.

END OF VOL. I.